'RIVETING WOMEN,' 4 | HOLIDAY LIFE, 25 | EDUCATION LIFE, 40

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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"The Bridge will now be able to do what we do best – offer a safe haven for young people and empower them to better their lives. We are thrilled to have this opportunity."

–Executive Director Margaret Hann

See story page 14

ON THE COVER

Phyllis Meredith took this photo, titled "Westmoor in Winter," in a Westmoor Park field.

Submitted photo
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‘Riveting Women’

2016 Women for Change calendar inspired by iconic image

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Courtesy photo

Since its inception, the cover of the Women for Change calendar has included women in a circle – a universal symbol of unity and female power.

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

History professor Erin Bartram discusses the the role women played in the workforce during World War II.

There was a lot of arm flexing going on in Dana Hall at the University of Hartford when the Women for Change organization got together for its annual calendar launch. The theme for the 2016 edition is “Riveting Women,” inspired by the iconic images of Rosie the Riveter during World War II as thousands of women took jobs in manufacturing, replacing men who had joined the armed forces.

Several women in attendance wore red-and-white polka dot headbands like the one worn by Rosie the Riveter in the J. Howard Miller image created for Westinghouse, depicting a women flexing her arm under the caption “We Can Do It.”

The headbands were an appropriate choice as these women – all of whom were featured in the calendar – celebrated “Riveting Women” and inspiring others from around campus and beyond.

Women for Change is a campus organization that “provides space for education, open dialogue and support among people of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, and sexual orientation surrounding body image issues, feminism and sexuality,” according to its informational brochure.

Associate professor Dr. Mala Matacin, the organization’s faculty advisor, founded the group following her 2008 course, “Women, Weight and Worry.” Matacin and her students enjoyed the course so much they wanted to continue the discussions once the semester ended.

Each campus organization is required to fundraise and Matacin, who lives in Simsbury, developed the idea of creating an annual calendar featuring regular women.

When thinking about the 2016 calendar, Matacin recalled seeing an article on Mary Doyle Keefe, the model used by Norman Rockwell for his May 29, 1943 Saturday Evening Post cover depicting Rosie the Riveter wearing blue coveralls, seated, eating her lunch with a riveting gun in her lap. Her foot is atop a copy of Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf.”

Keefe, who had worked as a phone operator in Arlington, Vermont, met Rockwell when he came in to pay his bill. She was 19 when she posed for him, and was paid $10 for two sittings.

In the introduction to the calendar, Matacin wrote about the theme, stating: “Today, her infamous image and message ‘We Can Do It’ has been used as a symbol of feminism and women’s economic empowerment.” She went on to say that with Keefe’s death, “the role she played in American history, and what Rosie the Riveter represents” prompted this calendar’s theme.

Matacin learned that Keefe was a “Riveting Woman” – she went to college and became a dental hygienist, married in 1949 and had four children, 11 grandchildren and five great grandchildren. She eventually settled in Simsbury.

“This woman sat for a painting and made history,” Matacin told those gathered at the calendar unveiling party held in November. “Nobody knows what part we are going to play in history.”

Guest speaker professor Erin

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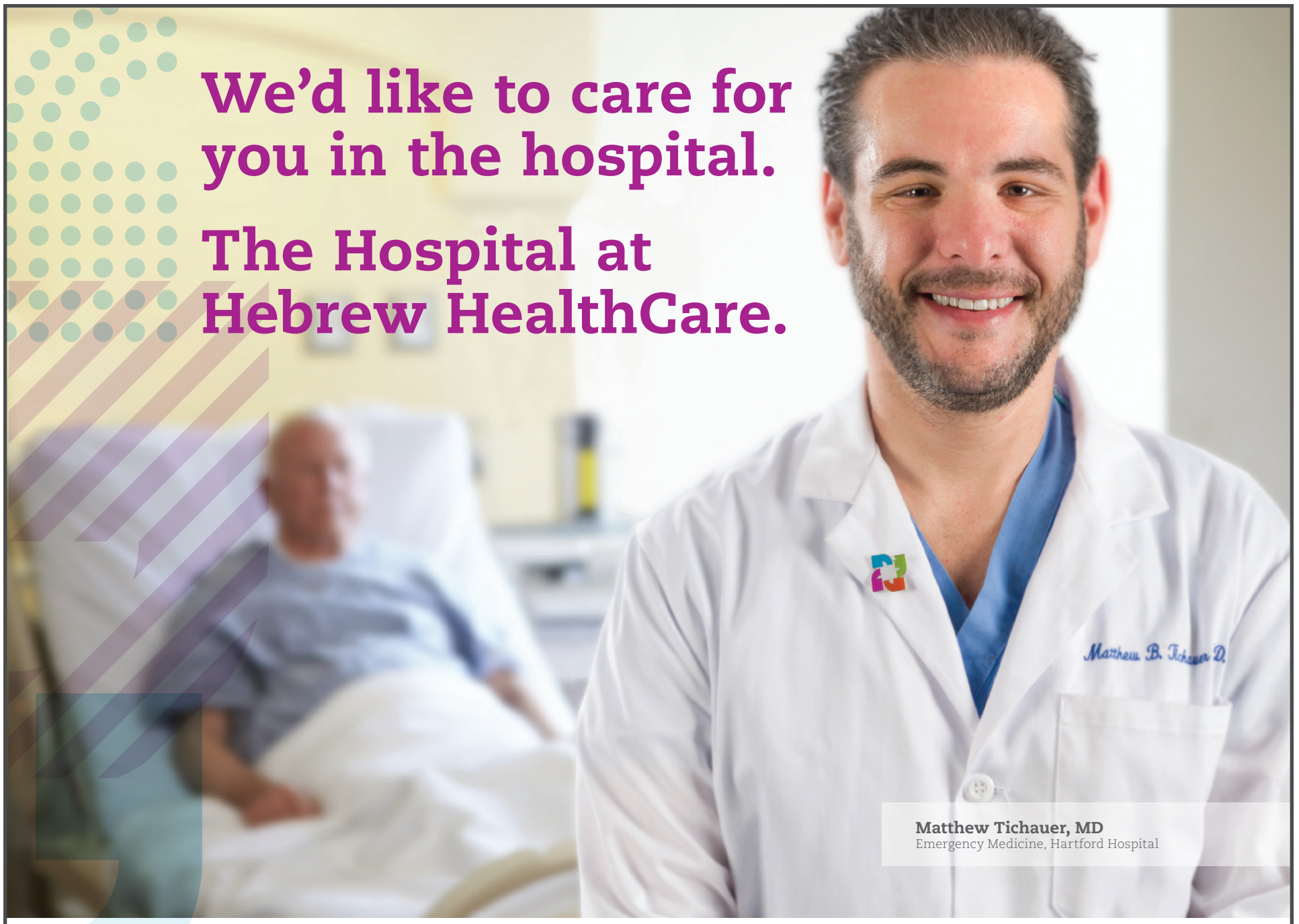

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Bartram explained how the Rosie the Riveter concept came into being and how these images, in various forms, depict women stepping into the workplace to fill a need. Bartram added, however, that while these images are often associated with the role women played in manufacturing during the war, they do not show that women were already part of the workforce.

Bertram said the Rockwell's image was an instant hit and the "We Can Do It" poster hung in a Westinghouse factory for about two weeks as a recruitment tool.

"Both Miller's and Rockwell's images were part of a government program to fill the voids of men who had gone overseas," Bertram said. "It was the dominant image of America at war."

The myth that women were new to the workforce, Bertram said, is not entirely true, as women had been working for many years.

"Women didn't just say, 'We can do it,' they had been doing it all along."

Women's work history, Bertram explained, started in the home caring for their families and doing domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and gardening. Women in the 18th century were also responsible for making clothing. They worked as domestic servants and often took over their husband's business after he passed away.

"The rise of factories in the 19th century is told as a story of the decline of craftsman, but it was more of the mechanization of women's work; making cloth went to the factories," Bertram said, adding that many women, especially immigrant and younger women, went to work in these factories.

"Images of women in calendar, and in the media generally, have traditionally shown women as one-dimensional – as sexualized objects to be viewed. Our goal is to 'take back' the calendar and offer a different image of women choosing how we want to be photographed and defined."

–Mala Matacin

Bertram went on to explain that in the early 20th century, most white women did not work outside of the home, while 35 percent of African-American women did, and immigrant women also took their place in the factories.

"American women have always been working," Bertram said.

In the introduction that is part of the calendar, Matacin wrote, "Images of women in calendar, and in the media generally, have traditionally shown women as one-dimensional – as sexualized objects to be viewed. Our goal is to 'take back' the calendar and offer a different image of women choosing how we want to be photographed and defined."

Each year Matacin and the organization's e-board select a theme. Past themes have been "What is Beauty," "(I'm) Perfection," "(Em)Body Image," "Free to . . .," "Miss Represented" and "Super (Em)Powerment."

The 2016 calendar includes more than 90 women from high school, college, graduates, faculty, staff and the community. Two University of Hartford alumni and one baby are also featured.

Each participant was required to completing this sentence: "I am riveting because …"

Maya Weiss, a communications and psychology double major, who appears as one of the women for February, said her mother had the "We Can Do It" poster hanging in her office and it served as a reminder to Weiss of all the sacrifices her mom had made for her and her brother.

"I really look up to my mom and I wanted to dedicate this to her," Weiss said.

She answered the question with, "I am riveting because of my interest in people, in strangers."

Karishma Pinto, a communications major said, "I am ambitious, that is what makes me riveting." Pinto appears as part of the March page.

Psychology major Marissa Lawrence described herself as an advocate. In her calendar write up she stated, "The idea of Rosie the Riveter created solidarity among women to enter the workforce while our country was at war. In a sense she herself was an advocate for this cause and for women in the workforce to come together. This is why I strongly identify with Rosie and what her image stood for because it's not just about setting a new standard of what should be done,

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but rather being a force that will make others stand with you."

Matacin said at the launch party, "I think I am riveting because I have a curiosity about everything."

Matacin's mother, Helen Matacin, was also featured in the calendar.

"I am fascinating, vivacious, spirited and positive," Helen Matacin said at the event. "Thank you for including me in an era I never thought I'd be in. I've lived a full life, but I am not done."

Matacin had the opportunity to reach out to Mary Doyle Keefe's daughter, Mary Ellen Keefe, who lives in East Granby and attended the launch.

"My mom would be really proud of the next generation," Mary Ellen Keefe said. "She was a great role model for me and my daughters."

She said the image of her mother as Rosie the Riveter was something she always felt showed "strength and femininity."

"As the mom of a daughter, I am just proud of what this group is doing," she said of Women for Change.

The group is organized through an e-board and this year had eight members, six of whom will graduate from UHart in the spring. Matacin said she has always welcomed anyone who wanted to join the board.

Rochelle Louis serves as the vice president and secretary for Women for Change and initially worked as an intern to help the organization.

"It's been great doing it," she said. "We have a very great supportive group of people."

Louis appreciates that the calendar is "not all about beauty."

"You get to know the people in the calendar," she said. "You may not know them personally but you know what they said."

"The first calendar I asked, 'What is beauty.' We didn't think we'd get 12 responses. We got double that. No one wrote about beauty in the conventional way," Matacin said.

She said that with those first responses she knew she was on to something and had struck a nerve with the women to whom she had reached out.

When the calendar project first began, Matacin would read all the submissions.

"It's grown each year," she said. "It's amazing to me."

This year's calendar coordinator Lizzy Synalvoski, a senior art major, said she was especially impressed by the responses from the Young Women's Empowerment Group at Watkinson School who are also included in the calendar.

Synalvoski took Matacin's "Women, Weight and Worry" class – a course she called "amazing." By the end of it she was asked to join the e-board.

In 2011, the organization began to reach out to other groups, which receive a portion of proceeds from the sale of the calendar. This year's recipient is the New Britain Sexual Assault Crisis Service that offers confidential assistance to survivors of sexual assault. Several members are featured in the 2016 calendar.

What Matacin has come to realize through the years of advising Women for Change is that "we are just connected to each other in large ways that we don't even realize."

"While we may all be different in age, race, sexual orientation, there is something about women I love honoring," she said. "There is strength in all that." **WHL**

The Women for Change e-board embraced the "Riveting Women" theme for its 2016 calendar.

Courtesy photo

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Lawrence Wolfson wears the French Legion of Honor medal he was awarded this fall for bombing runs at the end of World War II that helped liberate France. It was presented by French Honorary Consul Isabel Evelein.

French honor veteran

Lawrence Wolfson awarded the Legion of Honor

by Lynn Woike
Editor

No matter how cold it gets this winter, Lawrence Wolfson, 91, won't be as cold as he was flying in the belly of a B-17 over France 70 years ago.

The radio operator and gunner was awarded the French Legion of Honor medal for some of his bombing runs at the end of World War II that helped liberate France. Acting on behalf of the French government, French Honorary Consul Isabel Evelein made the presentation.

"He deserves it," she said, noting he was one of the young, brave men who played an important part during the liberation stage.

Dr. Nancy Toombs, whose father served in the same bomber squadron, was responsible for him receiving the honor, Wolfson said, adding that three others, including her father and two men from the 493rd Bomb Group have also been awarded the medal.

"It was because of some bombing raids the 493rd did in April [1945] on gun emplacement and German entrenchment positions in France," Toombs said, adding, "those campaigns ... late in the war" made him "fully qualified for this medal."

Although he has other medals and ribbons, Wolfson said this is currently his favorite.

Wolfson enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force in 1942. He was 18 and right out of high school, living in Ozone Park in the southwestern section of the borough of Queens in New York City.

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Courtesy photo

Lawrence Wolfson poses in front of the dorm at St. Cloud State Teachers College in Minnesota where the U.S. Army Air Force conducted officer training.

At the time, the only officer and aviation cadet training was at St. Cloud State Teachers College in Minnesota.

"Essentially there were all women there except for a motley crew of about 60 or 70 of us cadets. So, it was a good time for all," he said, laughing.

Although he went through aviation training for six months, "there were too many pilots," he said, so he opted to become a radio operator.

"Our flight training consisted of small airplanes with skis [for landing on ice and snow]. That was my first initiation to flying," he said.

Wolfson was part of the 8th Air Force, which flew out of Duback Air Field in England in World War II. He was in the 493rd Bomb Group, in the 861st Squadron – one of the bomb group's four squadrons.

"They were there 1944-45 and I was there in late '44 and all the way into '45 and the end of the war in Europe," he said.

Showing a photo of the B-17 crew with which he worked, he said, "I don't know if any of them are alive. After the first year, we moved around a little bit so we never really got together. I never saw them again or heard or read of them ..."

Wolfson flew 26 bombing missions, in addition to four special flights.

Recalling two food missions – to Amsterdam and Rotterdam – immediately after the war ended, he said, "We came in at rooftop level, with wheels down which indicated surrender because there was a German battalion still in Amsterdam. ... So we came down at rooftop level because if you drop food from too high, you'd have nothing left.

"Actually, what we dropped were sacks of flour, 100-pound sacks of bread-making flour. And the sacks were in sacks so that if the outer bag broke, the inner one retained the stuff – most of the time."

There were also two missions on which he was one

"There was never a flight were we didn't have battle damage, antiaircraft damage. They averaged about 40 holes a plane, sometimes worse."

–Lawrence Wolfson

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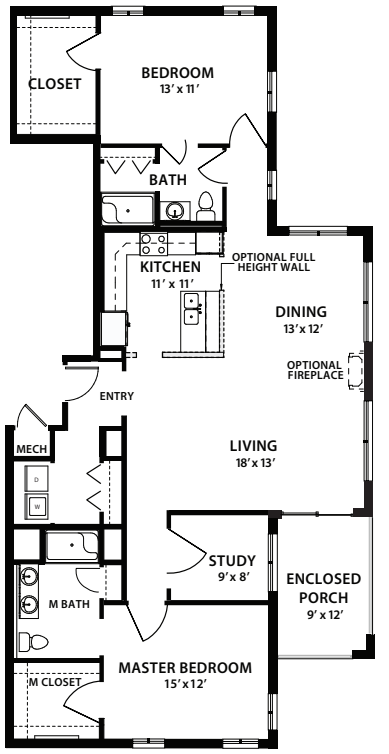

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of the skeleton crew – pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, navigator and radio operator – "repatriating French POWs."

Wolfson said, "They had been in prison camps, captured when France surrendered earlier."

One camp was in Austria, the other in Czechoslovakia.

"The bombers were modified. The bomb bay racks were taken out, plywood put down on the bottom of the bomb bay with wooden benches so that 40 POWs at a time could be taken and transported on a B-17 which normally has a crew of nine.

"In those days, the planes weren't that powerful. Four-thousand pounds of bombs was a big deal with the weight and the fuel consumption."

During the war, missions were flown every three days, sometimes every two "if there was a dire problem," he said.

They'd be awakened about 4 a.m., be fed steak and eggs for breakfast, and then get ready to take off before sunrise. Flights could last 12 hours, with the bombers flying about 150 mph. There was no food aboard. If you were lucky, you saved some of your candy rations, he said.

"We were on oxygen all the time. In the wintertime and the early springtime, it was very cold. It was 50 and 60 below zero outside with the wind chill factors and on the inside it wasn't much warmer since we had no heat.

"The [flight] uniforms were unique. You dressed in the silk which contained your heat and then you put on your normal coveralls, and then on top of that was a heated uniform" that plugged into the plane's electricity and kept your chest, legs and feet warm "if you were lucky. ... On top of that was fur-lined suit. So we had four layers of clothing because we had no heat in the plane," Wolfson said.

"When we left our airfield, we immediately went to 26,000 feet over the airfield before leaving to go to Europe. That was our altitude," he said of the optimum height for bombing.

No matter the weather, they flew, and the weather was often "pretty lousy," he said. Not so much snow, but fog and icy conditions at altitude so that his antenna would ice up, making communication impossible.

Wolfson also noted, "You navigated by radio, mostly" using the rotary antenna.

"There was never a flight where we didn't have battle damage, antiaircraft damage. They averaged about 40 holes a plane, sometimes worse. But on three occasions, we had severe damage. We were very lucky, I might say. We lost 40,000 flyers during that period of the war from the 8th Air Force, I'm told."

Once, Wolfson said, oxygen was lost so they had to drop down to 10,000 feet so they could breathe. The hydraulics were also lost on that mission, which meant they had no brakes and were forced to make an emergency landing at an airfield used by everyone who was in trouble, regardless of the country for which they flew.

Early in their tour, while becoming familiar with the plane, the crew had its left inboard engine blow. Attempts to shake loose the cowling failed, but the landing was successful.

The third major problem was when their plane was hit with flack while on a bombing run, "which caught the rubber life raft above the bomb bay on fire. So, we were on fire with white smoke coming out and members of other planes were asking what happened and we didn't know. ... We [didn't] see it."

Wolfson, who was stationed just behind the bomb bay, took a large knife, cut a hole in the thin aluminum to get to the sealed area and climbed half way in. He used fire extinguishers passed to him by other crew members to manage the situation as the raft continued to smolder. Hours passed and he ran out of fire extinguishers. The pilot made an emergency landing at a recently captured Luftwaffe airfield in Belgium, ejecting what was left of the 10-man life raft in the process.

In the air, Wolfson said, the crew was close and on a first-name basis. There were no salutes.

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Training in Dyersberg, Tennessee. “We were young kids,” Lawrence Wolfson (the only one without a hat) said of his B-17 crew.

Courtesy photo

On the ground, officers and enlisted men had different barracks.

Sharing a collection of old photos and documents he keeps in a folder, Wolfson said, “These are my memoirs.”

Among them were aerial photos that, until the end of the war, were classified. Then, rather than throw them away, they were passed “out to all the combat crews as souvenirs, so I kept mine,” he said.

After the war ended, he remained in Europe for a short while before returning to the States, helping transport one of the never-flown surplus B-17s that was slated to make its way to Japan.

Wolfson was discharged, having served two years and 11 months. He had earned the Air Medal with two clusters, American Campaign medals with battle stars for Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and a Victory Medal.

He went to school on the GI Bill, becoming a mechanical engineer and then worked for such companies as Gerber Scientific, where he was the vice president of engineering, and Combustion Engineering, which is what brought him to West Hartford in 1957. For a time he moved to California to make advanced propulsion systems for unmanned rockets before returning to Combustion, working in the nuclear reactor division.

“We designed and developed nuclear submarine naval reactors in 1967. There were only a few naval vessels that had nuclear reactors at the time, so that was early in the nuclear Navy operation,” Wolfson said.

He owns many patents, and traveled back to France often on business. He is a member of the Jewish War Veterans. **WHL**

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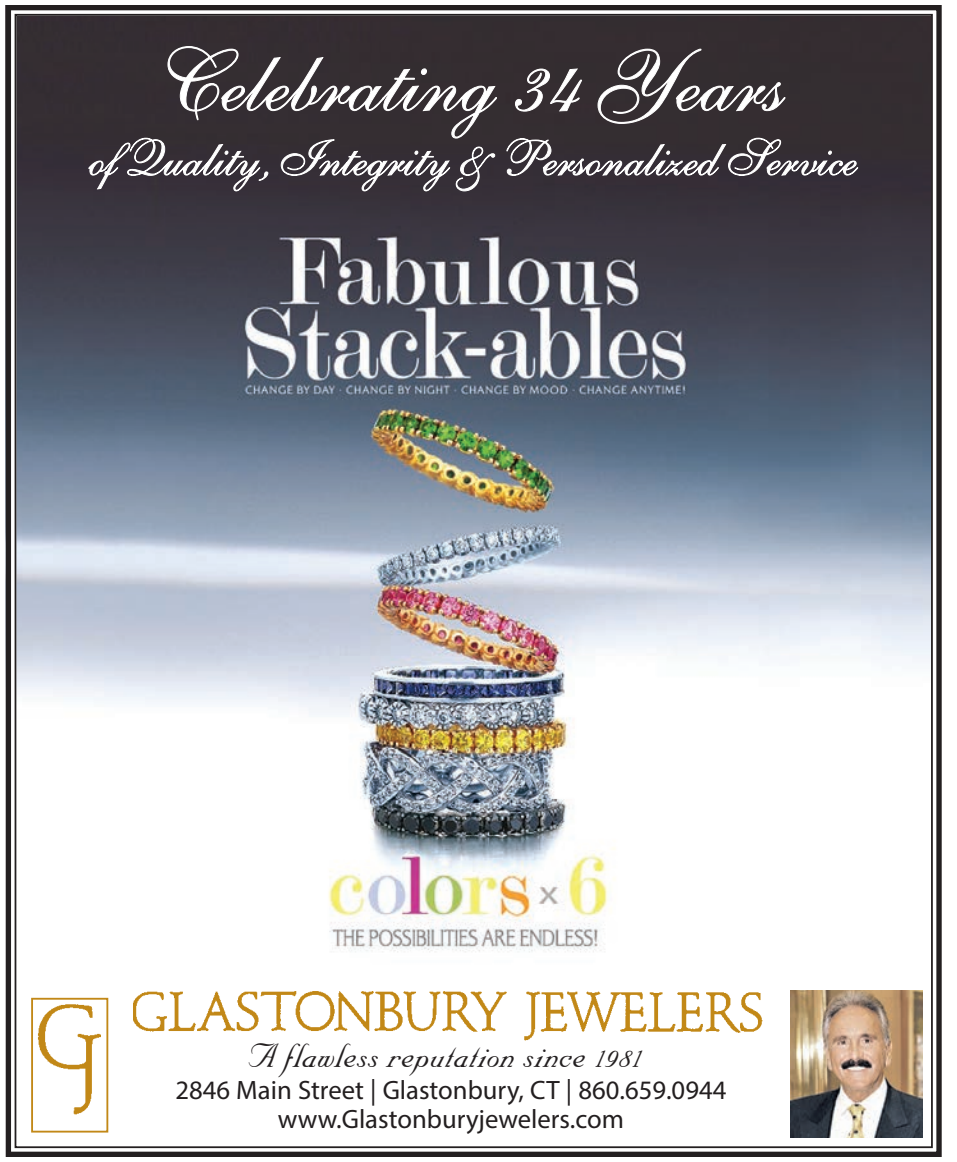
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Helping children and families

The Bridge Family Center expands its locations and programs

by Lynn Woike
Editor

The Bridge Family Center, begun in 1969, is continuing to expand its services – last year helping 7,100 clients and operating with a $8.2 million budget. Formed to meet the needs of young people engaging in high-risk behavior, it is reaching more area children and families in crisis and providing them with more intervention and prevention programs.

In April, the West Hartford-based nonprofit opened a new clinic at 45 West Main in Avon that offers individual, couple, and family therapy for children and families. It's the third

Courtesy photo

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center: an office opened in 2010 in Rockville and there is one in the center on Farmington Avenue.

An open house was held at the Avon location to showcase the four individual counseling rooms and a larger room for group therapy.

"We determined there's a need in Avon and the surrounding towns for counseling services the Bridge provides," said Executive Director Margaret Hann, noting there are "families in that area that are overwhelmed, in crisis. We do have a lot of clients struggling with past trauma histories, anxiety and depression."

They may be going through a tough patch with a divorce or a death. "We help people get through those difficult times and move on," Hann said.

Concerns may also include anxiety, depression, school concerns, behavior issues, abuse and neglect, anger, trauma, self-destructive behaviors and substance abuse.

"The Bridge has been working with faculty from several Avon schools on incorporating mindfulness – a technique encouraging calmness and staying in the present moment – in their work with students," said Pat Tyler.

A Bridge therapist in the Avon clinic stated, "A first grade boy was referred by his school for disruptive behaviors at school. The family was in the process of a divorce and the young boy was hitting other children and refusing to follow the directions of his teachers. Upon meeting with the family, we set up a meeting with the school to discuss how we could help this first grader through this difficult time. We worked collaboratively with the school to develop a plan.

"During therapy sessions, we worked with the boy to teach him the skills to manage his feelings, cope with his anger, and effectively communicate his feelings with both of his parents. Within the following three weeks, there was a dramatic decrease in his acting out behaviors at school."

A recent client at the Avon office emailed her therapist saying, "Thanks for talking with me yesterday. I came home with a renewed sense of strength regarding all this."

"We were also awarded a grant from CHEFA to hire an additional therapist who specializes in substance abuse counseling," Hann explained. That individual will have appointments at all three locations, helping in cases where substance use is presenting a problem.

The new specialty was added after a need for it was identified, she said, noting that the Bridge will take over the sustaining the program when the grant ends.

A $136,000 grant each of the next three years will support the Bridge's newest program, the Bridge Basic Center Program, also called the Pathfinders program. This crisis-support

Wish list

At the holidays – as well as throughout the year – The Bridge Family Center welcomes these items. For more information, contact Judy Bierly at 860-521-8035, X322.

Gift cards: Babies R Us, Barnes and Noble, Best Buy, BJs, Bobs, Bow-Tie Cinema, Buckland Hills Mall, CVS, Eblens, Jerry's Artarama, Kohls, Macys, Marshalls, Michaels, Old Navy, Rave Cinema, Target, TJ Maxx, Walgreens, WalMart, Westfarms Mall, restaurants (Chilis, Ruby Tuesdays, Olive Garden, Red Lobster, A.C.Petersons), supermarkets, Visa and American Express

Sports equipment (new): basketballs, tennis racquets, badminton racquets and birdies, soccer balls, bikes and helmets

Entertainment: Nintendo Wii games and accessories, Xbox 360 gaming console, karaoke machine, DVDs (G, PG or PG13)

Toys (new): board games, Legos, books birth to teens, doll house furniture, Play Doh, arts and crafts supplies (yarn, glitter, paints, canvases, etc.)

Clothing (new): winter coats, hats, gloves, scarves, socks, PJ bottoms (male and female, all sizes), flip flops

Household items (new or gently used): fire extinguishers, first-aid kits, alarm clocks, kitchenware, food containers, laundry baskets, flash lights and batteries, lamps, irons and ironing boards, vacuums, carpet steam cleaner, steam mop, lamps, twin sheets and comforters, towels, bath rugs

Personal items (new): cosmetics, toiletries, personal hygiene items

Foods: honey-baked spiral hams, non-perishable food, sport drinks, snack packages

Miscellaneous: journals, planners, yearly calendars, wallets, umbrellas

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In September, the Bridge kicked off a new school year with its annual breakfast – a 30-year tradition – at which it presented its Build No Fences Award to Lori Budnick. Budnick is a CPA and a partner and director of Blum Shapiro's Non-Profit Services Group.

She has had a connection with the Bridge since the 1990s, having served as treasurer and president of the Bridge board of directors, and is currently the chair of the finance committee.

Budnick was praised for her compassion, professionalism, leadership, loyalty, and desire to help children and families.

"Lori was instrumental in creating the Bridge's endowment fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to help meet the needs of future generations of children and families. She is a charter member of our Leadership Circle, donors who make generous multi-year gifts to support the Bridge. She is also a member of our legacy society, Builders for the Future, making a lasting difference for our kids and families," said Martha Rennie, director of development at the Bridge Family Center.

Courtesy photo

Judy Bierly, director of community services at the Bridge, presents the Build No Fences Award to Lori Budnick, a partner at Blum Shapiro.

program will provide emergency assistance to runaway, homeless and street youth of all orientations and genders in the Greater Hartford area who are 13-17 years old.

The Bridge estimates it will assist approximately 130 youth with emergency services and support, and will offer emergency shelter with temporary stays of up to 21 days to 15-30 runaways and homeless youth.

Speaking of young clients in need of help, Hann stated in a press release, "Imagine being a teenager living in fear on the streets, wondering when your next meal will be, or whose couch is available that evening. Imagine feeling lost, tired, lonely, afraid, and invisible.

"The Bridge will now be able to do what we do best – offer a safe haven for young people and empower them to better their lives. We are thrilled to have this opportunity."

Each year, approximately 2,500 young adults ages 14-24, including approximately 165 runaways and homeless youth, access a wide array of services at the Bridge – the only provider of comprehensive services to this group in the Greater Hartford area, which has a primarily urban population of more than 890,000.

Care includes 24-hour crisis intervention, stable and safe living accommodations, assessments, case management and follow-ups. Family counseling with the goal of reunification, prevention and treatment for substance abuse and mental health issues, and opportunities for education and life skills development are all

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The Bridge Family Center opened a counseling office at 45 West Main Street in Avon. The shelters are made to be as homey as possible.

part of the program.

The ultimate goal is to ensure youth-in-crisis are equipped with the skills necessary for enduring wellness and an ability to overcome life's challenges, according to the release.

In addition to specific programming, the Bridge also offers shelters and short-term home stays in West Hartford, Manchester, Southington, Wolcott and Harwinton as well as a therapeutic group home for girls in Hartford and a transitional living program for older teens.

The Bridge Family Center, in partnership with Charter Oak International Academy, established the Family Resource Center to support the healthy development of families in the community. Five locations – Charter Oak, Smith School of Science and Technology, Wolcott Elementary, Webster Hill Elementary and Hillcrest Neighborhood Center – serve about 950 West Hartford children and parents. Programs and support services enhance parenting, promote family involvement with the schools, and help children to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Family literacy is a big priority at the Family Resource Center. Its second cycle of Baby Bookworks for ages birth to 3, an eight-week program focusing on reading to babies, is currently ongoing. Parents learn new interactive ways to read with their children and connect with the library to build a lasting love of reading.

A grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and funding from Berkshire Bank allows it to be offered twice a year.

Twice a year, the Bridge also hosts the Parent Leadership Training Institute. Developed by the Connecticut Commission on Children, it trains, inspires and empowers parents to become effective advocates for children. The next 20-week session kicks off with a retreat Saturday, January 16 at Conard High before moving to Thursday evenings. Twenty-five participants who live or work in town will be selected. Each completes an individual community service project in an area of interest. There is no fee to participate. A family dinner and childcare are provided.

An evaluation completed by a recent attendee stated, "PLTI has ignited a part of me that was dormant. The class reminded me of who I am at my core. It helped to rattle me a bit and shake off the cobwebs. It motivated me to get back out there to connect and make my community what I want it to be.

PLTI has helped me to feel connected to my town and state. It has introduced me to amazing people and has given me a foundation, which I hope to build upon. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to be a part of such a wonderful program that inspires and connects parents from all different walks of life. It helped to cultivate a community of parents who are invested in their town and can be powerful agents of change."

The Bridge Family Center services are funded by the State of Connecticut Departments of Children and Families and Education, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the town of West Hartford, and private donations from individuals, foundations, corporations and organizations.

The center is governed by a 15-member board of directors. Staff numbering about 200 are assisted by more than 175 volunteers.

After a year of work, the Bridge launched its new website in November.

"We wanted a site that was more up to date, more compelling, and easier to navigate," said Judy Bierly, director of community services. WHL

For more information, visit http://bridgefamilycenter.org/.

To schedule a counseling session at any location, call the main number at 860.521.8035. Afternoon and evening appointments are available.

For more information about the Family Resource Center, call 860-929-5575.

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The Baker brothers – David , middle, and Billy, far right – will be joined by a few friends for a snowshoe race February 27 in Vermont.

Marathon snowmen

Brothers challenge themselves in snowshoe ultra-endurance races

by David Heuschkel
Staff Writer

The younger brother is a history teacher and coach at a private school in West Hartford. The older one is a sales executive for an Ohio-based print and communications company. They both still play in the snow.

You might say David and Billy Baker, part-time adventure seekers, are in it for the long haul. To say the Kingswood Oxford alums avoid short cuts, preferring instead to go the distance, would be an understatement.

The Baker brothers are no sibling rivals. Rather, David and Billy have been challenging themselves for several years as endurance athletes. Their next challenge figures to be a chilling mystery through the Vermont woods.

The Bakers will compete in the Frigus Snowshoe 60K race February 27, making their way through unknown – and ungroomed – trails for 37.2 miles in Goshen, Vermont. The event is an ultra-marathon because it is longer than 26.2 miles, the length of a standard marathon.

"I actually don't know the terrain for this course. I know it's two 30K loops," David Baker said. "The ones I did before – the marathons – were four loops up a mountain. I believe this one is going to be through a state forest, so I'm guessing we'll be going up a

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"Some years there's three to four feet of snow. Some years there's only a foot of snow."
–David Baker

mountain but I won't know until I get there."

Just follow the signs, Billy said.

"It will be in the woods, in the mountain, in the trails. We haven't seen it yet," he said.

Not knowing the course or what the conditions will be that day is what he and his brother signed up for when they registered for what will be their fifth snowshoe race. However, this one is about 12 miles longer and on a different course, making it more physically and mentally challenging even to these endurance race veterans.

"People who [organize] these races don't typically tell you about the course," David said. "The marathon I did last year was different, they blazed a different course. You kind of go in not knowing."

Competitors won't know how much snow will be on the ground or how cold it will be. One year, David said, the temperature was 8 degrees below zero at the start of the race.

"It varies from year to year," he

David and Billy Baker, part-time adventure seekers, are in it for the long haul.

Courtesy photos

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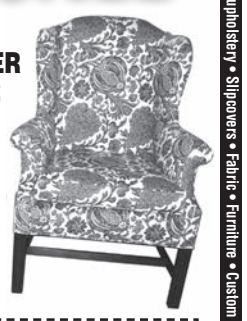

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"You got to achieve great things in work, with your family and with your own health and family and seek adventure. I see it as a triangle. You want to keep the triangle balanced."

–Billy Baker

said. "Some years there's three to four feet of snow. Some years there's only a foot of snow. One year we got an email that said it might be a trail race. Two days before the race, they got a 1 ½-foot snowstorm, so we got to race with snowshoes."

The Bakers have run marathons and half marathons. They've done Ironman and Olympic triathlons. In the fall of 2012, David completed a 50-mile race in a little over eight hours. The following summer, Billy put his body and mind through a high-altitude, around-the-clock adventure when he completed a 100-mile trail run in Colorado. He finished in 29 hours, 37 minutes.

The thought of doing a snowshoe race first occurred to the Bakers while they were walking around their parents' house in New Hampshire on snowshoes with a friend. Someone jokingly mentioned doing a marathon in snowshoes, not knowing one even existed. Upon returning to the house, a quick search on the computer revealed a snowshoe marathon in Vermont had been going on for a couple years.

The Bakers signed up to do the next one that winter and have made the pilgrimage to Vermont every year since. In the 2015 race last March, David finished second in 6 hours, 36 minutes. His brother's time was 6:59.

The course tends to change – elevation can increase – from year to year, so their finishing times have varied. If a runner can complete a marathon in 3 ½ to four hours, it will probably take that person somewhere between six to seven hours to do one on snowshoes, David said.

"Every year they've changed the course, and they tend to make it harder each year," he said.

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The ultra-marathon race the Bakers are competing in this winter could be the hardest one yet, given it is longer and there are only two 30K loops, compared to four shorter loops in a marathon-distance race, which gives competitors twice as many opportunities to change gear or refuel.

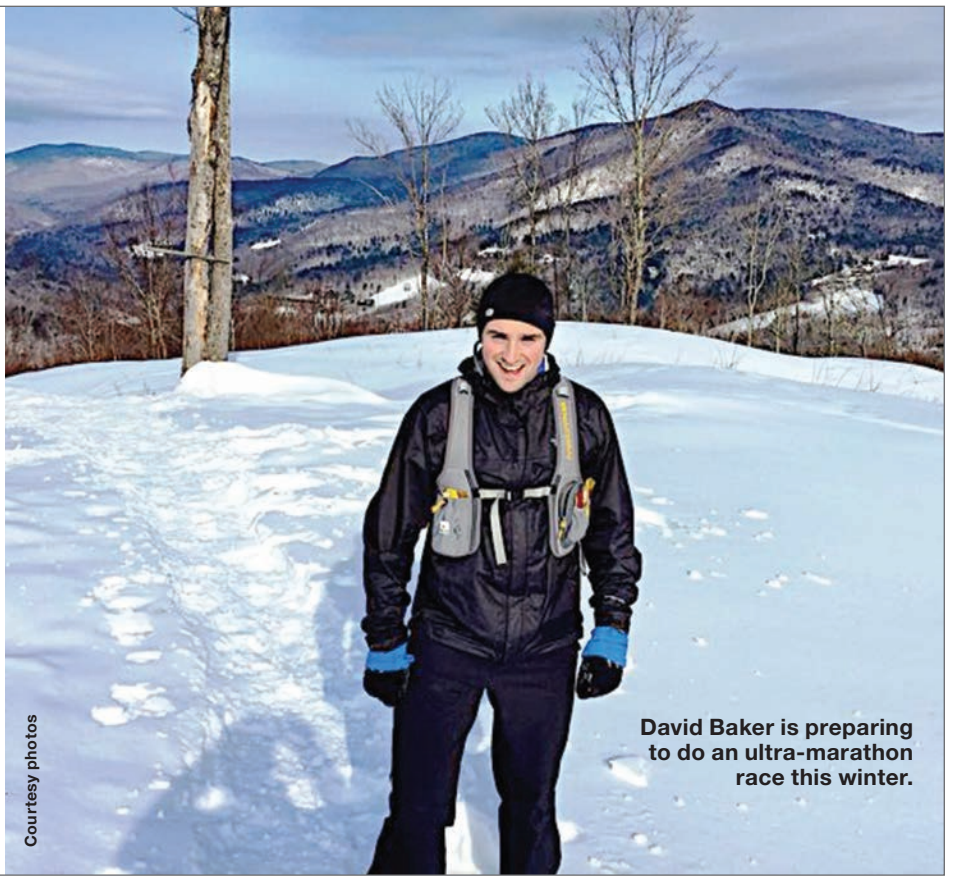
Assuming it will be cold, as it tends to be in late February in northern New England, keeping your feet and water supply from freezing is among the challenges for the competitors.

"It's a little more low key than a marathon or a traditional race. It's kind of nice having a race like that," said Billy, KO class of 2000. "The people that are there are a little bit odder than the rest. It's a neat community. The best thing is it allows you stay in shape in the winter months when a lot of people are taking off.

"You get to see what you can accomplish, how far you can go. At the same time you got to keep a balance. You got to achieve great things in work, with your family, and with your own health and family and seek adventure. I see it as a triangle. You want to keep the triangle balanced."

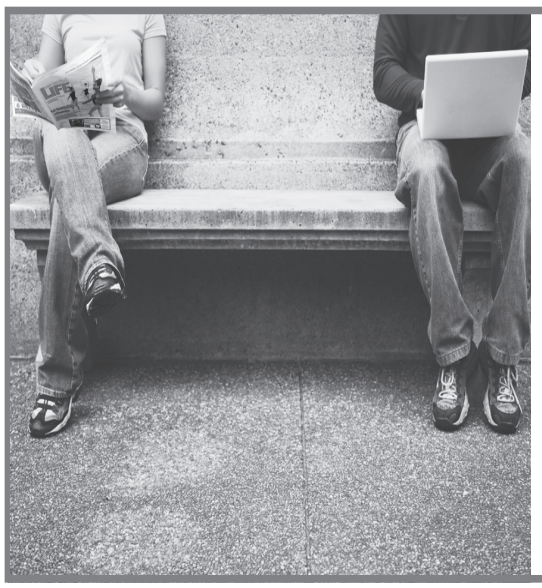
The Bakers decided to do this ultra-marathon race this winter because the date of the marathon snowshoe race they've done the last four years was switched, creating a conflict with vacation plans.

"This year I just want to finish it," said David, KO class of 2004. "It's going to be a long day. I think it can be anywhere between 10 hours and 12 hours, maybe longer." **WHL**



Courtesy photos

David Baker is preparing to do an ultra-marathon race this winter.



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Congregation celebrates its organ

Concert series plays to the power of music 50-year-old instrument provides

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Photo by Lynn Woike

Floyd Higgins plays the organ at Beth El Temple.

An organ built by Austin Organs Inc. of Hartford 50 years ago is about to go from being a handmaiden to the choir and the cantor to the star of the show.

"Anything that's 50 years old, we honor it," said Floyd Higgins, who has been the organist for the past 10 years. "It's the jubilee anniversary."

The instrument is divided and placed at either end of the choir loft immediately behind the stage at Beth El Temple on Albany Avenue. In all, there are 1,651 pipes – each handmade – controlled by a three-manual console.

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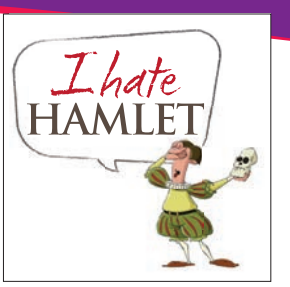

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The contract signed in January 1963 put the organ's cost at $36,000.

It was a gift given to the temple by the women of its Sisterhood, who raised funds for several years with a variety of projects. A concert and reception was held January 9, 1966.

Eliane Freund, co-chair of the synagogue's music and arts committee, said, "The Sisterhood of Beth El Temple lovingly financed the purchase and installation of our Austin organ through proceeds from a long-running, legendary juried art show and sale that they organized for many years. Much of the Jewish 20th century art that hangs in the temple's corridors and communal spaces today were purchased by members at these art shows and subsequently donated to the temple to enhance our aesthetics.

"We're pulling out all the stops. ... It's been humble for 50 years, now it's going to front and center for this year."

–Floyd Higgins

Jewish tradition teaches that elevating the aesthetics of our houses of worship with symbolic art and inspirational liturgical music is very meritorious, a loving testament to the artistic and musical riches that characterized the ritual services of the ancient Temples of Jerusalem."

Music plays an important role in temple life, said Cantor Joseph Ness, explaining, "Music is so important in liturgy because it creates a parallel motion to the word and as a result adds expression – maybe in a more visceral sense – to what the words attempt to express.

"And it is with that in mind that we use music to express the ethos that the word strives for. In some sense, music represents to me, the primordial prelinguistic attempt to express. It is older than the word."

The organ has helped with that expression at Beth El.

While it has faithfully carried out its subservient role, supporting the cantor and the choir, Higgins said, a series of three concerts over the next six months will "pick it up a bit" and give the instrument "a more soloist or majestic role" to celebrate its anniversary.

The series kicks off December 20 at 7 p.m. with "It's All Relative."

"This concert is a celebration of the power of friends and family members making music together," Ness said, noting it will feature a husband and wife, three sisters and a pair of "musical brothers."

"The music is by three of the great composers in our Western culture," he said.

"Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat major, K. 364" is Mozart's "last and greatest work for string solos and orchestra," filled with "the deepest

Photo by Lynn Woike

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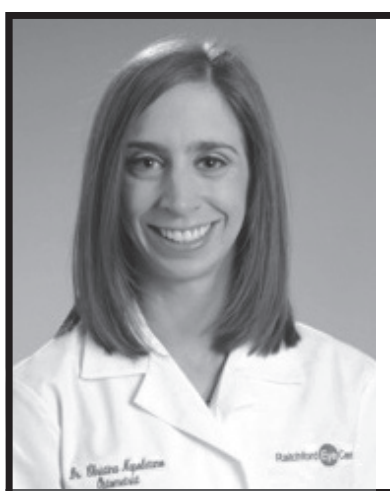
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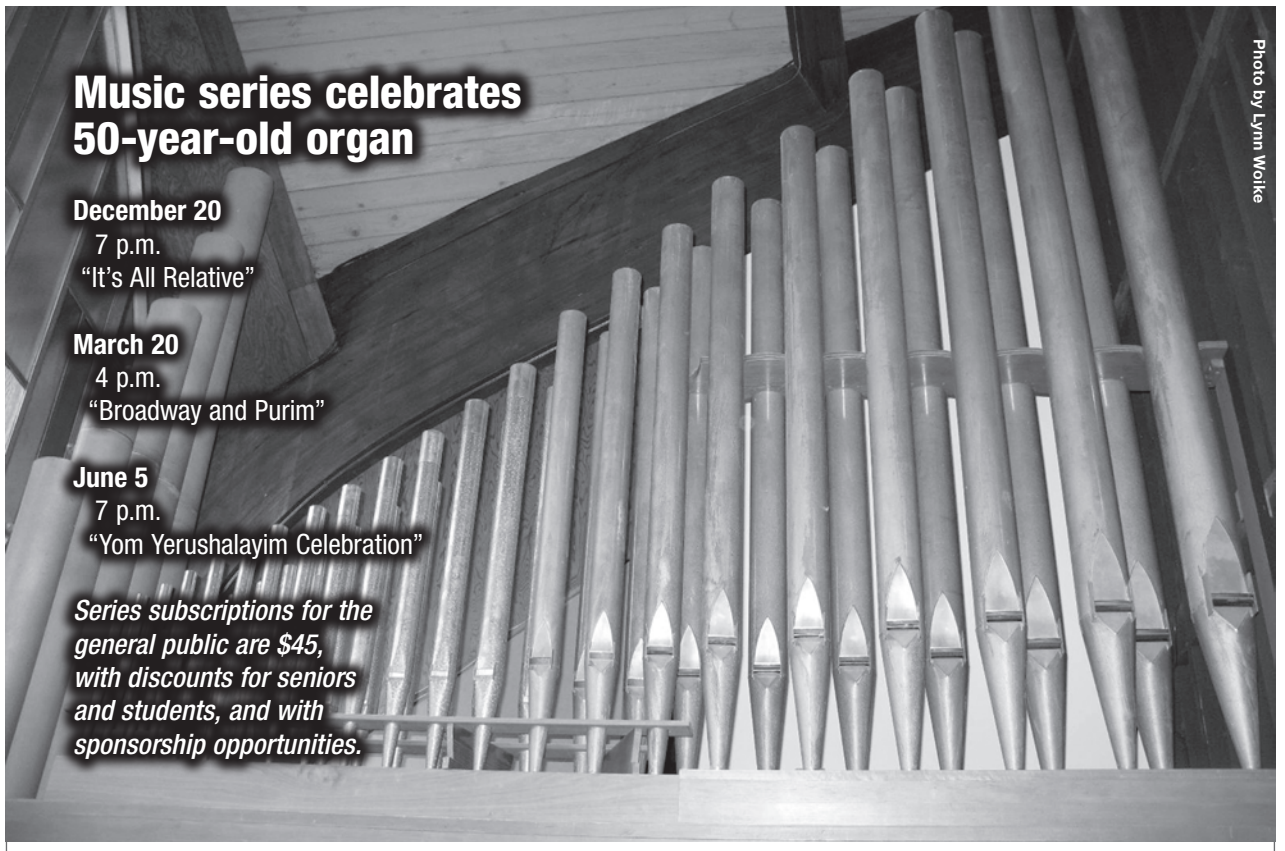

Music series celebrates 50-year-old organ

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Series subscriptions for the general public are $45, with discounts for seniors and students, and with sponsorship opportunities.

Photo by Lynn Woike

feeling that can be imagined," he said. It features Anton Miller on violin and his wife, Rita Porfiris, playing viola.

The second movement will have three sisters performing Beethoven's "Triple Concerto in C major, Op. 56."

"It is a concerto filled with a dialogue between the three instruments and we are anticipating the interplay of our soloists who are three sisters," Ness said.

Chaaeyoung Son will be on the violin, Jinyoung Son on cello and Ahyoung Son on the piano.

Highlighting the organ will be Higgins, who will play the Handel "Organ Concerto No. 13 in F Major, HWV 295 : The Cuckoo and The Nightingale" – while his musical brother, Ness, will perform three heartfelt songs by Russian-Jewish composer Joel Engel, as well as conduct the Beth El orchestra.

"This concert is also a celebration of the wonderful talent that is found at the Hartt School – both teachers and students," Ness said of the 60 musicians who will form the orchestra.

Two additional concerts are set for March 20 and June 5, 2016. They, too, will feature the organ.

"We're pulling out all the stops," Higgins said, explaining that the phrase refers to organ stops, which control the loudness and tones; when all of them are pulled out, the organ can play all tones simultaneously.

"It's been humble for 50 years, now it's going to front and center for this year," Higgins said.

He has been playing piano since he was 7 and began playing organ at 12.

"There's a slightly different touch," he said, noting that how hard you strike an organ key does not change the volume, but that you can sustain a note for as long as your finger is on the key.

"The low, sustained power of the organ makes it a good accompanying instrument," he said.

Organs are often associated with churches, but historically they have been a central fixture in reform synagogues, Ness said, adding that in New England, conservative congregations – such as Beth El – also use organs, particularly on the high holidays and some Friday evening services.

"It gives you the ability to lead congregational singing," Higgins said.

While it remains in good condition, after 50 years, the organ – with a replacement value of $1 million – needs some attention, he said.

"Some go longer, some don't make it quite as long," said Curtis Hawkes, a project manager at Austin Organs. "It has some perishable material in it that deteriorates over time. Those need to be periodically replaced."

Of all the pipe organs the company has built, 17 were installed in places of worship in West Hartford, including St. James's Episcopal Church, Congregation Beth Israel, St. John's Episcopal Church, First Church of Christ Congregational and the chapel at the University of Saint Joseph, he said.

Describing the organ, he said, "It really is a little jewel ... a tremendous asset to both Beth El Temple and the community. ... It's impact on the room is utterly charming, you might not have expected ... [it to have such a] great deal of warmth and character and subtlety." WHL

Concert tickets may be purchased at the door: $20, $15 for seniors and students, free for ages 12 and younger. Beth El Temple is located at 2626 Albany Avenue. For more information, see bethelwesthartford.org or call 860-233-9696.

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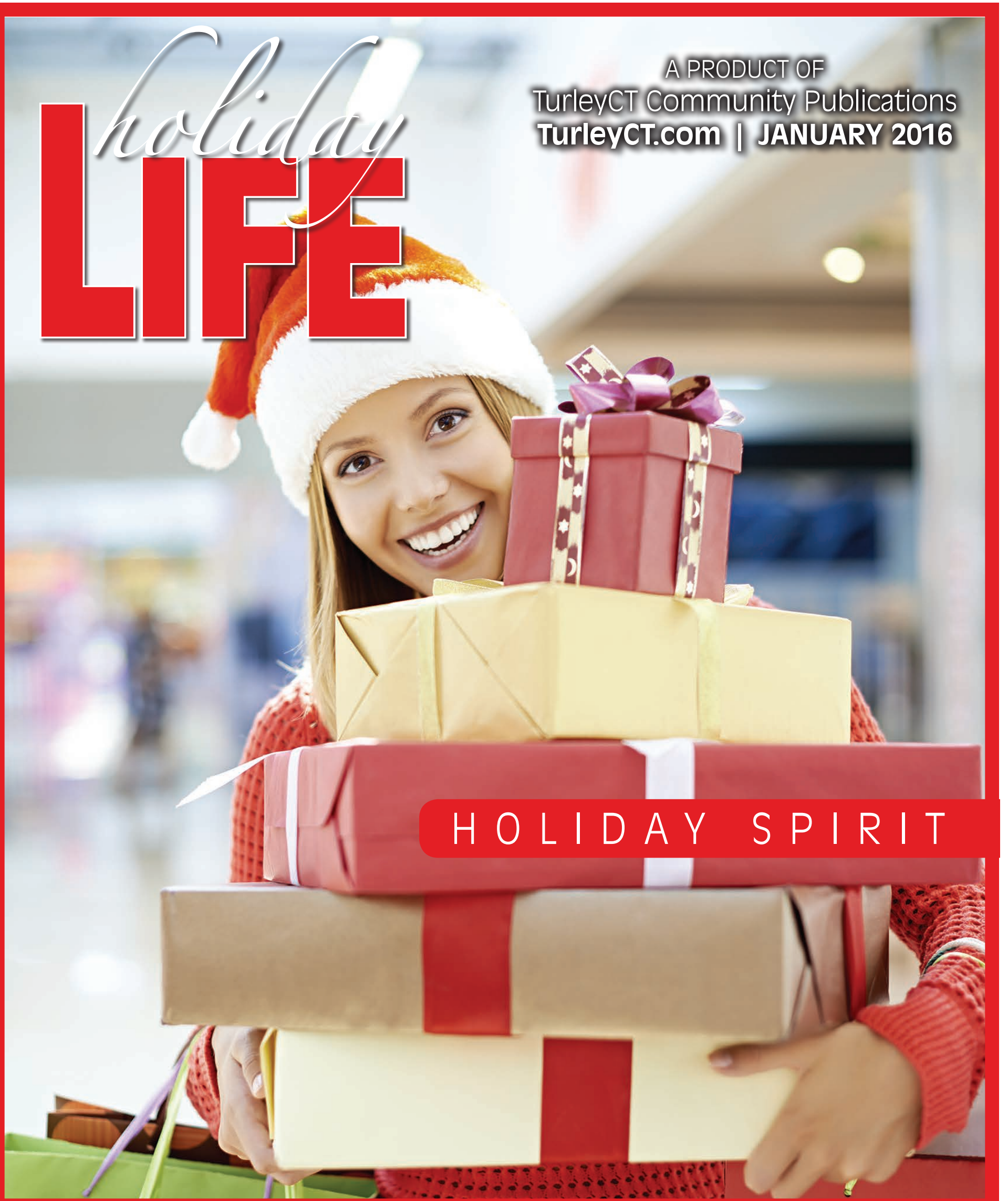

HOLIDAY SPIRIT

From the heart

There is still time to make your own holiday gifts

by Sloan Brewster and Alicia B. Smith
LIFE staff

When getting ready to hang stockings by the chimney with care this year, why not make your own stockings?

Homemade gifts do not have to be intimidating and are a unique way to show friends and family how much you care. Marion Carling, owner of Village Wool in Glastonbury, assured there was plenty of time to make a knitted or crocheted gift. This year, many of her customers are coming in to make infinity scarves, towels and fingerless mittens, while a few are sticking with traditional mittens.

"There are things out there that are very simple," Carling said.

For those who have never knitted before or perhaps it's been awhile, Carling said knitting is a skill that needs to be learned.

"It's not something that you can automatically pick up," she said.

Her shop does offer a weekly drop-in knitting session Thursday evenings where newbies may be able to learn some tips and get started. For those whose needle skills may be rusty, there are simple projects, like the aforementioned infinity scarves or a regular scarf, which Carling said is basically a long rectangle.

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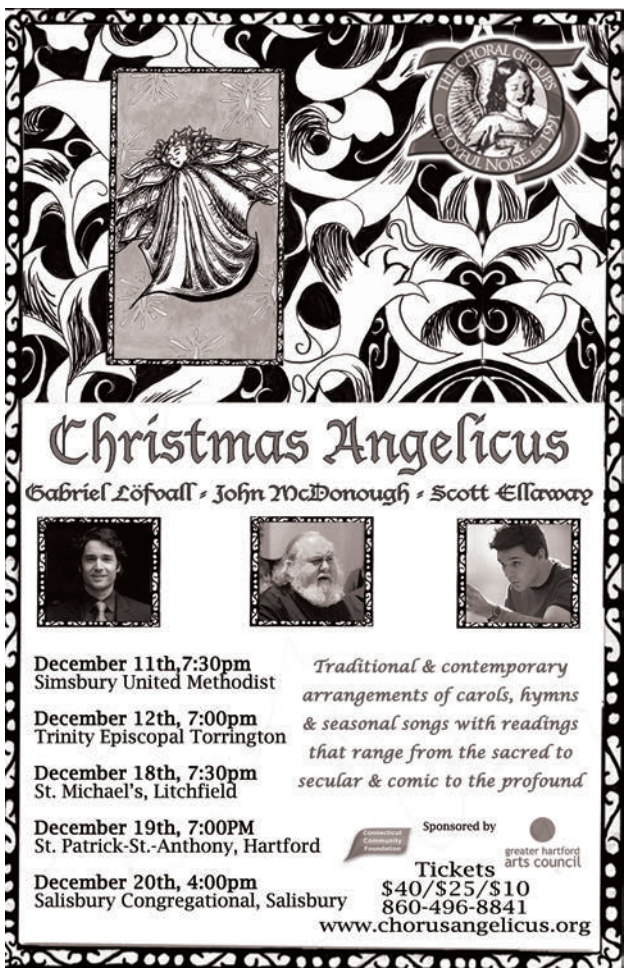
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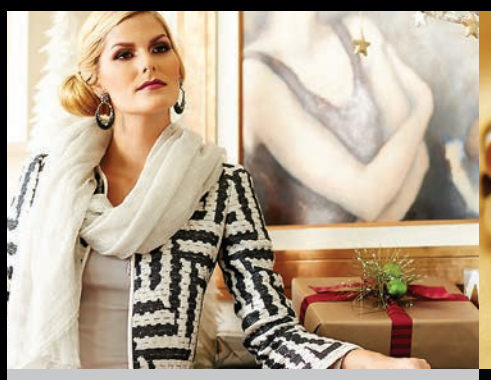

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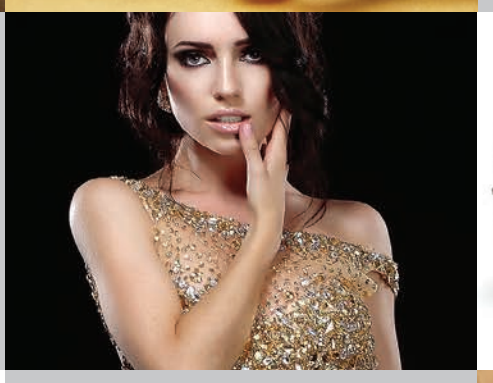

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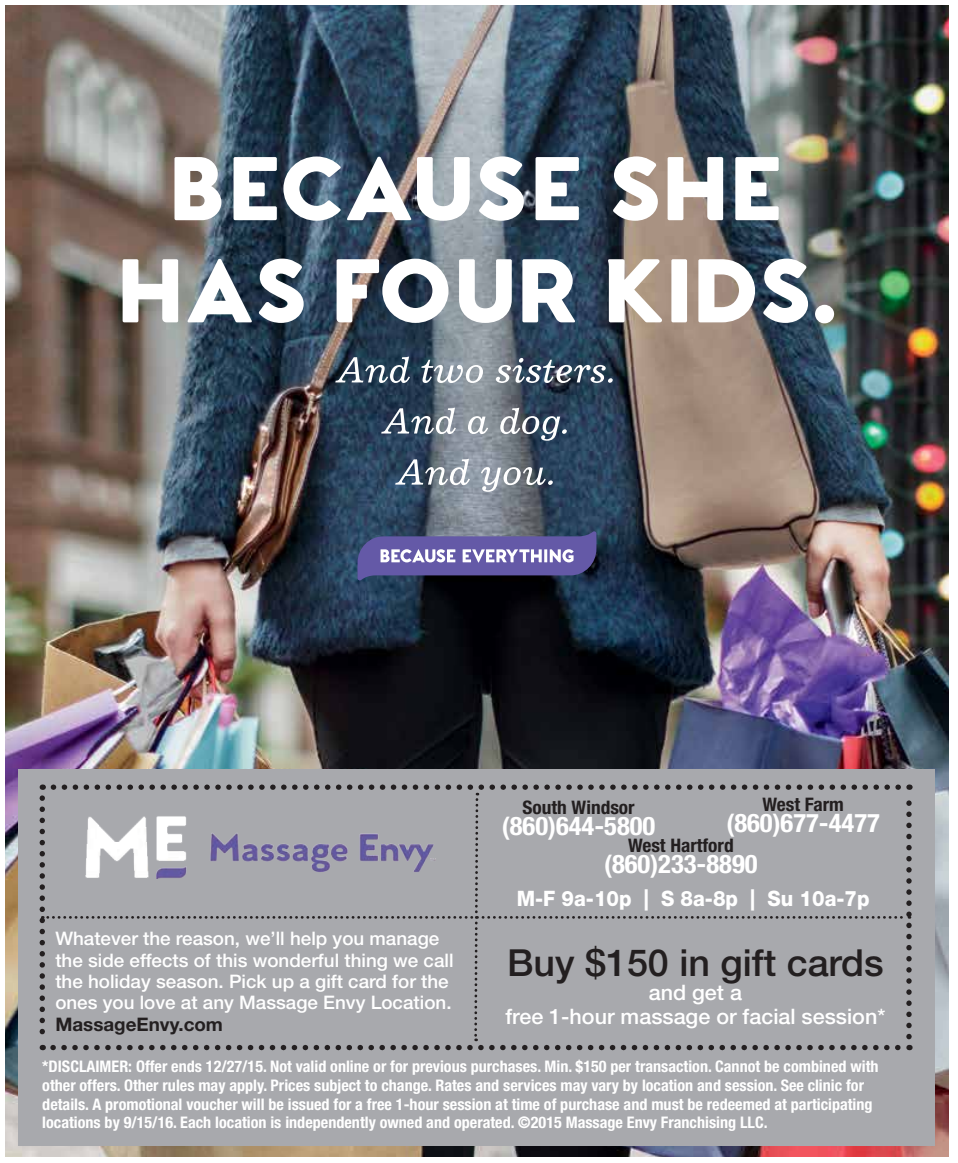
Holiday LIFE

Above, left: A handmade gift by Grace Epstein. She made catnip pillows with catnip that grows on the The Ethel Walker School campus. Above, right: Kemi Oluwakemi Richards, a student at The Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, places her hands beside a hat she knitted as a gift. Far left: Grace Epstein of Simsbury creates ceramic mugs for holiday gifts; Left: Epstein also makes jam, including strawberry rhubarb and blueberry, and gives it away as gifts for the holidays.

"People who are not knitters can pick up projects like that," she said.

Carling has several customers who get busy this time of year because they are making homemade knitted gifts for their loved ones. She said hats and even Christmas stockings are popular gifts.

"I really think it's more personal," she said of the homemade option. "It just shows more thoughtfulness; you are thinking about what someone would want. Also, it's enjoyable to make. Usually, people do it because they enjoy knitting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and crocheting. For them, it's a sort of creative expression, and they are able to make a nice gift for someone."

For those interested in knitting one, purling twice, but are not sure of what to make, Carling stocks several magazines in her shop that are specifically for gift making.

The Claypen in West Hartford is another great alternative for making a unique gift for a friend this holiday season. The walk-in studio carries a wide selection of gift ideas that can easily be personalized – coffee mugs, picture frames, platters and more – that guests can choose and paint for themselves.

There is no need to worry about whether or not artistic skills are in abundance; the staff can help and they also offer a number of stencils and tape for straight lines to assist those who are less confident about free styling with a paintbrush.

In addition, patrons can try their hand at glass fusion, another creative option, where guests begin with a glass base, arrange colorful glass on top of the piece before it's put in the kiln to fuse, and later it returns to the kiln to be shaped into a bowl or any number of other items.

"This time of year is our busiest," Stephanie Yearsley, store manager, said. "People want to come in and create something useful for someone."

A popular gift item at the studio is taking handprints or footprints of children to be given as a gift for grandparents.

Yearsley said at least half of the studio customers come in to make an item for someone else.

"That is more tangible. You have to use your imagination," she said of painting an item. "We love so much being a part of people's memories and gift giving, it's true. We see people come in and really put themselves into it. It's personal. They are keepsakes; they are memories."

Christmas does not take a break for many customers of Thistle Needleworks in Wethersfield. Owner Judi Solomon said many of her customers are in gift-making mode all year long.

"There is satisfaction in putting a little love into everything you are doing – you are thinking about that person as you are making it," she said.

The shop offers a number of classes, and one of her students told her she was making a gift for her pending great-grandchild and said the project was something she could do from her hands and heart.

Solomon's shop carries a number of items for counted cross-stitch, needlepoint, crewelwork, hardanger (a type of embroidery) and more.

Customers can find kits to help them on a complete project or all the materials needed to create their own.

Among the gift items to select from are wall hangings, pillows, ornaments, Christmas stockings, bracelets and cuffs, purses and wallets, boxes, trays and mirrors.

"To me, boxes are both functional and decorative. They are always a nice item to make," Solomon said.

She has been doing needlework since she was a child and assured that anyone can pick it up or take a refresher class.

"I love needlework and I love to share it," she said.

Lilah Kelly, a student at Simsbury's The Ethel Walker School and a resident of Rocky Hill, prefers to make gifts.

"I don't really like buying things," she said. "I feel like I put more of myself into it when I make them. I know that sounds really cheesy, but it feels like it's more from me than from a store."

This year, she is embarking on a new project she discovered on Pinterest for her parents' gift.

"I'm making sort of like a folded book sculpture. The word 'joy' is being folded into it," she said.

With each calculated fold, she will transform the pages inside the book until the folded pages form the word.

To assure the folds will fall together correctly, Kelly counted the pages and determined exactly how to craft each fold, she said. Still, it's not too complicated, and directions and pictures of similar projects can be found on Pinterest.

As of November 1, the endeavor,

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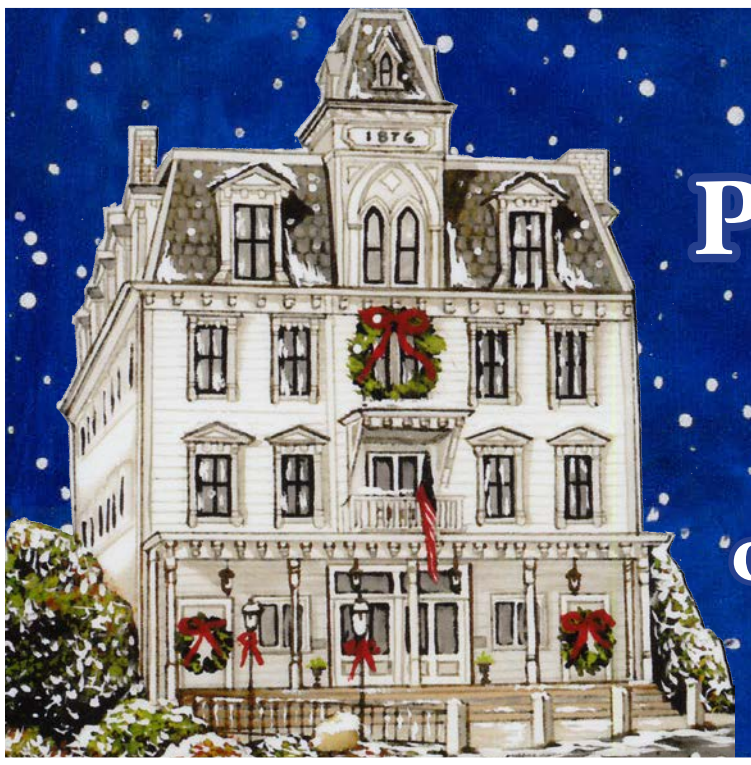

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Holiday LIFE

which was doubling as an art project, was not yet completed and was taking a little longer than Kelly anticipated. At that point, she had been working on it for about two months in art class and devoting about an hour to it each weekend.

Gift-making projects she has completed in the past include potholders, friendship bracelets, sewn pillows and Christmas ornaments.

Grace Epstein, a Simsbury resident, art teacher at Ethel Walker and Canton Art League member, is also big on making gifts.

"Generally, what I have done is whatever I like making becomes a present," she said.

She especially enjoys showing up at the holidays with a basket of unwrapped handmade treasures and telling family members to choose what they like.

"It usually is something kind of fanciful," she said. "It gives them the opportunity to pick what they want."

While some of her projects are artsy, such as sculpting ceramic mugs and firing them in her kiln or one at the school, she has also made simpler creations.

She's done knitting, making hats and such, and likes making catnip pillows, using catnip, which grows all over campus.

"It's just a simple little thing," she said. "It's a good product."

Epstein also makes jams and loves blueberry jam, she said. The simplest way to make it is to buy frozen fruit, though fresh works, too. Prepare the fruit, getting rid of the stems and seeds if using fresh, and cook it up with pectin and sugar.

The cooking process only takes about 10 minutes and then, after the jam is sealed in jars, it's placed in boiling water for 10 more minutes, she said. Cool the jam and use it within a year; one batch makes about 10 four-ounce jars.

Avoiding the stress of stores during the holidays, making homemade gifts are an option for people of all levels of craftiness and shows an extra amount of care for the gifts' recipients. **WHL**

Village Wool is located at 2279 Main Street, Glastonbury. For more information, call 860-633-0898. The Claypen is at 997 Farmington Avenue, West Hartford. For more information, call 860-233-3322 or visit www.theclaypen.com. Thistle Needleworks can be found at 506 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield. For more information, call 860-257-2718 or visit www.thistleneedleworks.com.

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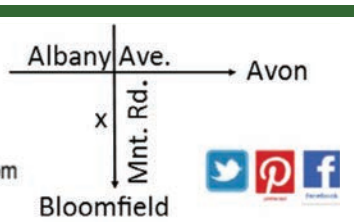

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Holidays made easy

How to maintain a festive spirit throughout the season

by Alison Jalbert and Nancy Thompson
LIFE staff

The holiday season is filled with festive imagery – sparkling snow, presents wrapped with beautiful bows, a twinkling Christmas tree adorned with ornaments and family gathered around a crackling fire sipping cocoa.

Whether or not that imagery is true to life is questionable, as the holidays often incite stress as everyone tries to attempt that ideal depicted in commercials and movies. Banish stress and chaos to the naughty list this year with tips from area experts on how to make the holidays more relaxing and enjoyable.

Stuff the stockings with care

What's not to like about an oversized stocking full of goodies? Emmy Lou DeBari, owner of Emmy Lou's Ltd. in Glastonbury, offered some ideas of stocking stuffers for anyone on your gift list.

Personal care items, such as hand creams made

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Holiday LIFE

in New England and body wash and lotions, are available in small sizes that fit nicely in stockings and meet airport security requirements. Soy candles can add a delightful scent to a home and are available in several varieties, including coconut-lime, pure lavender and vanilla.

Small bottles of hand lotion in almond-pear and pomegranate scents will have hands feeling and smelling like they've been to the manicurist, and French-milled heart-shaped soaps will turn any bath or shower into a spa.

Handy gadgets are popular as well. Small light-up pillboxes are great for use in restaurants, theaters and other places with dim lighting, and a wrist key-keeper combines the look of a bracelet with the utility of never again having to search for those keys. Armored wallets are small enough to fit easily into a purse or pocket, hold cards and cash, and protect cards from radio frequency identity theft. One of DeBari's favorite items is an LED flashlight that's flat and fits anywhere.

Ornaments geared to a specific interest, such as bicycling, snowmobiling or sports, or an event such as a first Christmas, not only decorate a family tree, but also turn into treasured keepsakes. Holiday-themed socks in red and green with Santa, mistletoe and other designs are another option.

Not all stocking stuffers need to come from a store. DeBari also suggested adding homemade cookies or fudge to a stocking for a personal touch.

Quick ways to make your home feel festive

It's easy to spend a lot of time and money on holiday decorations. For simple and affordable ways to make a home festive, Farah Assi Evenson, owner of Interiors by Farah in Wethersfield, offered several quick and easy ideas.

First, the wreath.

"Who can say holidays without saying wreath?" Evenson said. "A lot of people associate a wreath with fall and winter, but it actually can be used any time of the year. If you start with a basic wreath you can embellish it depending on the season.

For example, dress it up with pinecones, berries and ornaments for Christmas, or flowers or seashells for summer. Wreaths not only look good on the outside of your house, but will also look great hanging inside.

Next is the centerpiece, another decorative item that can be changed and used all year.

"For an attractive centerpiece, gather different size jars along with vases and fill them with faux greenery and berries in the winter," she said.

"Just like a wreath, they complement any holiday decor. Depending on the season, you can fill them with many different things. I like to fill mine with lemons or seashells in the summer."

How about those pillows? "One of my favorite easy ways to add holiday flair is to change all the throw pillows in my house," Evenson said.

"Whether it's the pillows on the living room couch or the pillows in the guest bedroom, it always makes the house look more festive. Throw pillows can go a long way and can be interchanged depending on the season. I have a few bags of them in my attic labeled for each holiday – deep reds and greens for December, blues and soft white for summer.

And finally, for coziness and warmth, how about cinnamon?

"Holidays are also the time to feel cozy and warm," she said. "Nothing does that better than the smell of cinnamon. Fill vases with scented pinecones and place them around the house. They don't have to be visible, but their scent alone will fill the house with a welcoming holiday feel."

Wrap it up

Gift wrapping seems so simple; cover a geometrically shaped present in eye-catching wrapping paper, tie a brightly colored ribbon around it and make a jaunty bow. Easy, right? Maybe, if you're Martha Stewart. Corners end up lumpy, bows lie limp and the whole presentation looks … off. Alison Swayne, sales associate at The Silver Dahlia in Simsbury, which also has locations in West Hartford and Glastonbury, said time is necessary.

"Realizing it will take time [is important]. Making a gift look nice

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Holiday LIFE

is part of gift giving. It's worth it," she said.

To expedite the process, she said pre-cut paper could be helpful if many gifts are the same size, and stick-on bows can look just as pretty as handcrafted bows, with much less effort.

Purchasing quality paper is important, as it's easier to wrap with good paper as opposed to a flimsier option, according to Deb Clark, key holder at Gift-ology in Blue Back Square in West Hartford.

Leon Davidoff, co-owner of The Paper Station in Newington, said there is a secret to successful wrapping.

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When wrapping a package – he used a shirt box as an example – all edges of the paper need to make a crease at the edge of the box.

"That will hold it there," he explained. "When you go to do the sides, do the same thing on every single side."

For those who are truly gift wrap averse, there are gift bags available in many sizes and designs.

Jillian Skau, an associate at SPIN Monograms & Gifts in West Hartford, said gift bags are easy and reusable.

Davidoff also has a secret to proper tissue paper placement in gift bags. Taking the piece, pull down from the center, like you are making a bouquet. Doing this with two or three sheets of tissue paper will get "that poof look."

"Everyone always enjoys a properly festive gift bag," he said.

Surviving holiday stress

Stress is often synonymous with the holidays, but Dr. Laura Saunders, a psychologist at Hartford Hospital's Institute of Living, said the first step is to set reasonable expectations for oneself.

"Oftentimes, stress is caused by the fact that our goals are too high or our expectations are unreasonable," she explained. "Therefore, we feel like we fall short of those expectations. Be kind to oneself and be reasonable."

It is also important to remember that families are often flawed.

"A lot of individuals don't have picture-perfect families," Saunders said. "It's OK to have families that have issues. Facebook and the media are overcompensation. Don't feel bad about your family dynamic."

When it comes to gift giving, the emphasis should be on quality, not quantity.

She said the greatest gift a person can give their children or nieces and nephews is an experience.

"Time and attention can be the greatest gift; it doesn't have to be the most expensive one."

Saunders said parents need to remember that bringing them to many different parties throws them off their daily routine. Keeping them on regular bedtime schedules and being careful about sugar intake will make things less stressful for everyone involved.

Too many parties and other social obligations can also be detrimental to adults; Saunders said they can have a negative impact on a person's ability to function at work and with their family.

"Be gentle with oneself and make sure you're not overreaching," she said. **WHL**

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Eggnog completes the party

The holiday season is rife with tradition. Families reunite to exchange gifts, enjoy meals together and do a little catching up along the way. But the holiday season also is synonymous with parties. Celebrations are a big part of this month and a main reason why this is such a festive and beloved time of year. As this is a season of celebrating, it's good to remember that no party is truly complete until eggnog has been served. Enjoyed almost exclusively during the holiday season, eggnog is as much a staple of holiday celebrations as stockings hung by the chimney with care. This year, impress your holiday guests with the following recipe for "Excellent Eggnog" from A.J. Rathbun's "Good Spirits" (Harvard Common Press).

Excellent Eggnog

Serves 8
8 large eggs, preferably organic
2 1/4 cups superfine sugar
8 ounces brandy
8 ounces rum
4 ounces bourbon
1 quart milk
Freshly grated nutmeg for garnish

1. Separate the egg yolks from the egg whites, setting the whites aside for a moment.

2. In a large mixing bowl, beat the yolks with a hand mixer until completely combined. Add the sugar and beat until it reaches a creamy consistency.

3. Add the brandy, rum and bourbon, then the milk, beating well.

4. In a medium-size mixing bowl, beat the egg whites with a hand mixer until soft peaks form (be sure before beating the whites that you have cleaned and thoroughly dried the beaters).

5. Fold the egg whites into the yolk-sugar-alcohol mixture. Refrigerate the mix until well chilled (at least 3 hours).

6. Stir to recombine as needed. Serve the eggnog in mugs, topping each serving with some nutmeg.

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Events spotlight

The Nutmeg Ballet Conservatory presents 'The Nutcracker'

It would not be the holiday season without the timeless joy of "The Nutcracker." The Nutmeg Conservatory will present "The Nutcracker" Saturday and Sunday, December 19 and 20 on the Warner Theatre's Main Stage in Torrington. Join Clara on a magical journey to the Land of Snow and the Land of Sweets where nothing is impossible and little Clara's most whimsical dreams become reality. Meet a brave Nutcracker prince, fairies, kings and queens, and little toy soldiers who face an evil Mouse Queen in this timeless holiday classic. There is something for everyone in this charming interpretation of ETA Hoffman's story set to the music of Tchaikovsky with choreography staged by the artistic staff of The Nutmeg Ballet. The production features The Nutmeg's professional trainees with cameo roles performed by students from the children's program at The Nutmeg's Torrington School of Ballet. This is a holiday tradition sure to enthrall audiences of all ages. Performances of "The Nutcracker" are Saturday, December 19 at 2 and 7 p.m., and Sunday, December 20 at 2 p.m. Tickets can be purchased by calling the Warner Box Office at 860-489-7180, or at warnertheatre.org.

Noël! Noël!

CitySingers of Hartford shares the joy and mystery of the season in performances of Noël! Noël! Sunday, December 13 at 4 p.m. and Saturday, December 19 at 4 p.m. at First Church of Christ, 12 South Main St., West Hartford. Both young and old in the community will delight in a blend of familiar carols in original arrangements for vocal ensemble and audience. In addition, choral compositions of the season will include works by Herbert Howells, Franz Grüber, Joel Cohen and Noël Goemanne. An array of instruments, including harp, woodwinds, suspended bells and pipe organ, will accompany the singing, and an original work by local composer and percussionist James Galvic will engage listeners through captivating use of instrumental color and texture in premiere performances of his "3 Noëls." A voluntary offering will be accepted.

WHSO Holiday Concert

The West Hartford Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of conductor Richard Chiarappa, will present the 2015 Holiday Concert at the West Hartford Town Hall Sunday, December 13 at 3 p.m. This annual concert is a musical celebration of the seasons including Tchaikovsky's waltz from "Sleeping Beauty," dances from "The Nutcracker" and Leroy Anderson's "Sleigh Ride." In addition, the symphony orchestra will play sacred music by Puccini as well as many other seasonal favorites. This year's concert will also feature tenor soloist David Baker. For tickets, call 860-521-4362, or order online from the website www.whso.org. Reserved table seating is available for this concert at $24 and general seating tickets for this concert are $18 and will also be sold at the door, which open at 2:15 p.m. **WHL**

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EDUCATION

‘Our children, our community, our museum’

The New Children’s Museum renews focus on education

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

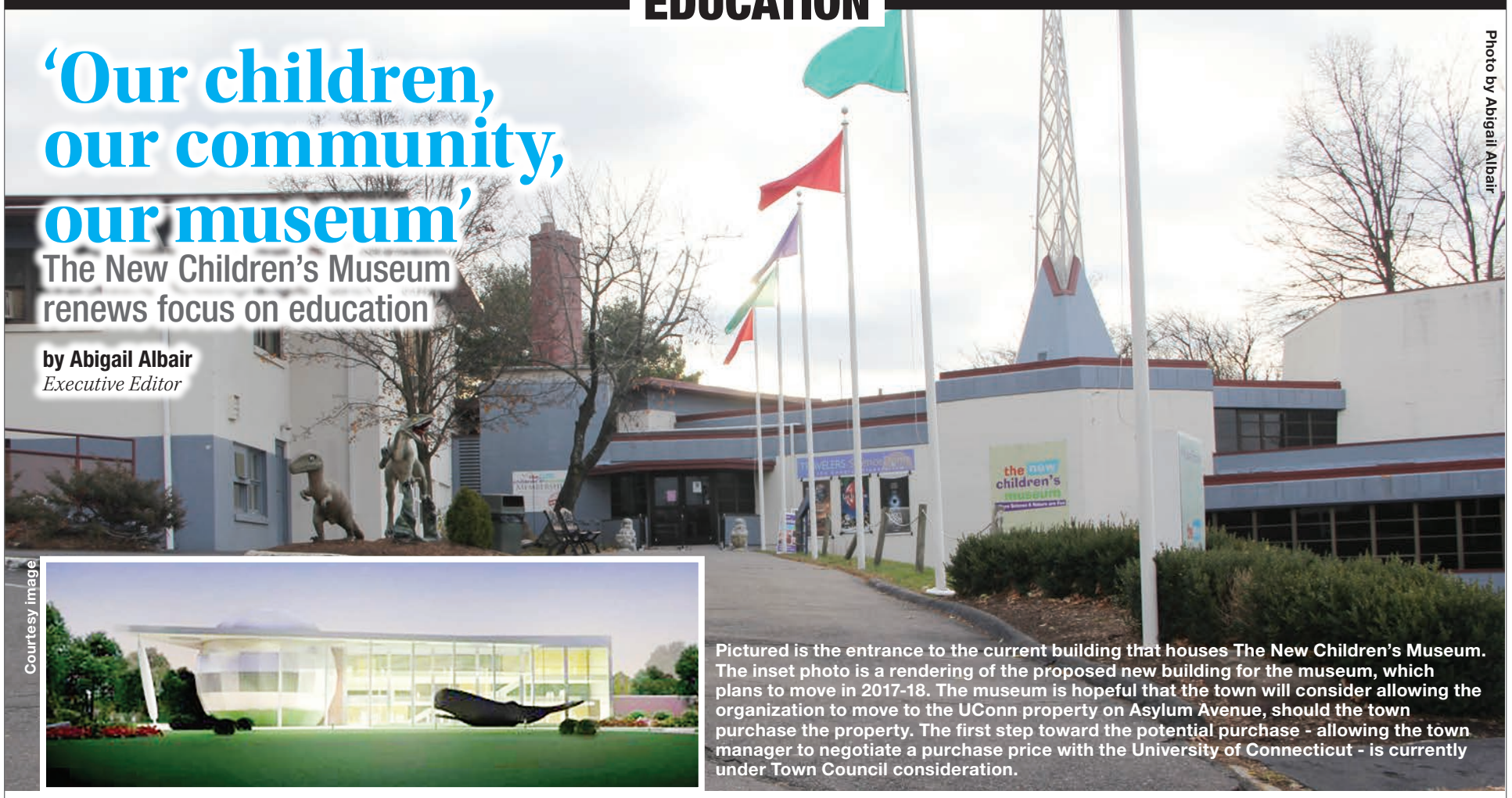

Photo by Abigail Albair

Courtesy image

Pictured is the entrance to the current building that houses The New Children’s Museum. The inset photo is a rendering of the proposed new building for the museum, which plans to move in 2017-18. The museum is hopeful that the town will consider allowing the organization to move to the UConn property on Asylum Avenue, should the town purchase the property. The first step toward the potential purchase - allowing the town manager to negotiate a purchase price with the University of Connecticut - is currently under Town Council consideration.

The New Children’s Museum is moving toward the future by making a return to past ways of conducting operations.

While the focus for the museum in recent years had become making the non-profit institution – the fifth oldest children’s museum in the country – more of an entertainment destination, the focus is now on getting back to the organization’s educational roots.

The shift has come under the leadership of Interim Executive Director Michael Werle, who took the reigns of the museum last spring.

“We are rededicating ourselves to education, and that’s both in the schools and in the public. We’re repositioning this place as a full-service children’s museum and our role model for that is the Boston Children’s Museum,” Werle explained. “They are mentoring us in this whole process.”

At a November 18 fundraiser for the museum, titled “Visions: For the Future of Our Children, Our Community, and Our Museum,” Boston Children’s Museum President and CEO Carole Charnow spoke about the importance of children’s museums in the community while museum leaders shared their plans for the years ahead with those in attendance.

The New Children’s Museum first opened in 1927 as a one-room natural history museum at Elizabeth Park.

It moved to its current location on Trout Brook Drive – situated on land now owned by Kingswood Oxford – in 1958. Through the years a variety of components were

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The Year of Conny

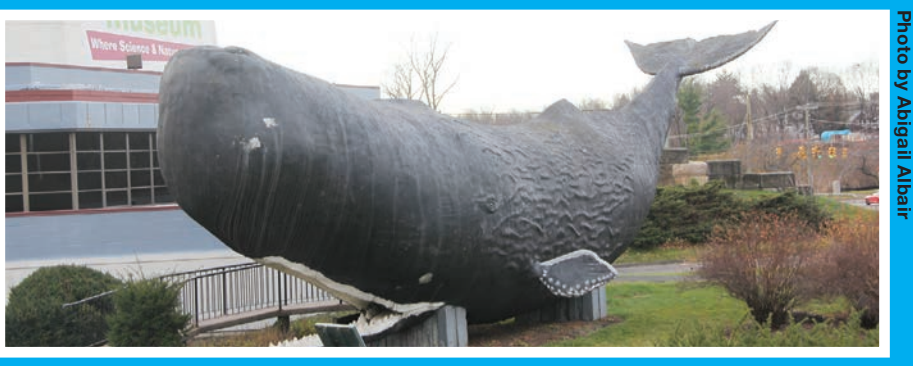

Photo by Abigail Albair

The iconic whale sculpture in front of The New Children's Museum is turning 40 years old this spring.

In celebration, the museum is in the middle of ongoing programming for "The Year of Conny." The "Where in the World is Conny?" fundraiser and social media campaign has attracted much attention, as visitors are encouraged to purchase a $5 Conny the Whale stress toy from the Museum, photograph it with them on family vacations, at local stops or on any other adventures and post it to social media with the hashtag #YearofConny.

The campaign began last June and Conny has traveled to spots around the United States and Europe as well as places closer to home.

While Conny serves as an educational stop for children at the museum, inviting visitors to climb inside, hear whale sounds and get sprayed by water from his blow hole in summer months – unlike real whales which do not squirt water but instead exhale hot air that forms fog when it hits cold surface air – the structure was initially built as a statement piece on the effort to save the whales.

The life-sized replica of the sperm whale was completed in 1976. The whale was named "Conny" after its home state, where it was designated state animal in 1975.

Numbers of sperm whales, which are federally listed as endangered species, are far reduced from centuries ago due to whaling. Selective killing of the larger breeding-age males over many years upset the male-to-female ratio, and the birth rate has declined in some populations, according to the American Cetecean Society. The Moby Dick whalers from 1740-1880 and modern whalers whose operations peaked in 1964, when 29,255 were killed, caused a drop in the estimated global population from 1,100,000 to 360,000.

In an edition of "The Connecticut Whale," a publication of the Connecticut Cetacean Society – now known as Cetacean Society International – editor Dr. Robbins Barstow details the undertaking that was the construction of Conny.

An article in the publication, dated June 7, 1976, explains that Conny is the only life-sized, ferro-cement model of a sperm whale anywhere in the world. It measures 20 meters long, six meters high and "is as scientifically accurate as possible a replica of what a live, male sperm whale actually looks like."

It took more than 130 volunteers a 19-hour stretch over Memorial Day weekend that year to apply 15 tons of fresh cement to a steel, wood and chickenwire framework. The materials were loaned and donated and the volunteers came from around the state, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey and Ohio.

For three days and nights after the cementing, the model was encased in a plastic bag with steam generators baking and curing the sculpture, the publication explains.

"The ultimate purpose of 'Conny' is to stop all human killing of sperm whales and other cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises)," the publication reads. "The model has been built to show what an incredibly marvelous and magnificent creature this great marine mammal is, with the largest brain (20 pounds) of anything ever to have lived on planet earth."

The museum teamed up with Cetacean Society International to offer s year of educational programs for children and families leading up to Conny's birthday in May of 2016.

CSI hosts regular meetings at the museum for those interested in becoming part of the ongoing effort to save the whales. Its next event is set for Monday, December 14 with a program at 6 p.m. and a meeting at 8 p.m. The public is invited to hear about the recent World Whale Conference in Portugal and about CSI events of the past year. The event is free and open to the public. For moreinformation visit, csiwhalesalive.org. For more information on "Year of Conny" contact Amy Kosciukiewicz at akosciukiewicz@thechildrensmuseumct.org.

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Courtesy photo

Educator Sara Horwitz teaches children in the museum's preschool.

established, including the science curriculum-based Children's Museum Preschool that opened in 1946, The Travelers Science Dome at the Gengras Planetarium that opened in 1968, the acquisition of Roaring Brook Nature Center as part of the museum in 1973, and the opening of the United Technologies Wildlife Sanctuary in 1981.

As the museum evolved throughout the decades, the name changed numerous times, taking its current name in 2006.

"Eighty-nine years is a long time," Werle said. "We have a legacy, to say it like it is."

The museum houses more than 100 animals in its on-site sanctuary and hosts regular and traveling exhibits, but its mission is tied to education Werle said, something that has been overshadowed by efforts to attract one-time visitors rather than regular museum users in recent years.

Half of the museum's earned revenue comes from offering educational services to schools, be it on-site or in school classrooms.

"We've begun a two-to three-year strengthening program to return to what we were," he said.

The aim is to be a full-service children's museum that focuses on not only science and nature, but also art and music, Director of Operations Beth Weller said.

"Everything has to have a learning component," she said of museum offerings. "Everything is hands-on learning. Our camps are learning camps."

The museum, which engages in more than 100,000 child interactions each year, strengthened the programs it offers to schools in nearly every town in Hartford County this year and is working on building its relationships with towns around the state.

"We're doing all this while being cognizant of the changes in the formal education standards," Weller said. "The state is moving from Connecticut State Science Standards to Next Generation Science Standards."

As "partners in teaching," museum outreach educators travel to schools and also welcome students on field trips, for planetarium presentations, for a combination of museum workshops and planetarium programs, and for field trips to the nature center. In-school and on-site educational programs are aligned with state curricular standards with a focus on interactive activities to help children engage and learn.

Classroom programs touch on topics such as electricity and magnetism, botany, weather, forensic science and even the architecture of bridges.

The focus for exhibits is expanding

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EDUCATION

to include the arts, for example the exhibit "Puzzled," which features hands-on stations that introduce children to scientific and mathematical concepts while exposing them to optical illusions and design components.

"What we're trying to do is bring all the elements together," Grants Manager Julie Barnofski Portfolio said.

In February of 2016, an exhibit based on the science of mixing colors will open. That will also have artistic undertones, she said.

"It will connect design and science and engineering parameters, perception, how biology works, and understanding light and color with the arts piece, like how you mix colors and how a printer functions to get what you need on paper," she explained.

The museum will also launch a series of public programs, Werle said, and is working to collaborate with local groups and establishments ranging from the Girl Scouts to the Jackson Laboratory to bring new opportunities to the community.

"In essence, we're trying to position ourselves somewhat as a thought leader in the child development space."

–Interim Executive Director Michael Werle

"In essence, we're trying to position ourselves somewhat as a thought leader in the child development space," he said. "We can't be in the business of educating kids and not take on that charter."

With operational changes underway, the museum is also looking toward a physical change in the next few years.

The hope is that the museum will have relocated to a new space in 2017-18. The board's current proposal is to move to the University of Connecticut campus on Asylum Avenue that will be vacated in 2017, but theirs is just one of many the town will have to consider should it decide to take ownership of the land.

The university notified the town last month of its official intent to sell the land and buildings of the West Hartford campus and offer the town right of first refusal as required by state statutes. Should the town seek to purchase the property, the university would negotiate a purchase and sale agreement, or do so with another buyer if the town refuses to pursue the opportunity.

The town has a limited window in which to respond that expires January 15, 2016.

The 58-acre campus is located in a residential neighborhood at the corner of Asylum Avenue and Trout Brook Drive, and is bisected by a watercourse, Trout Brook, and some of the area is wetlands. It is located within an R-10 zone, which permits residential, school and church uses, but not commercial development.

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The Town Council had not yet met on the matter as of press time, though Mayor Scott Slifka explained when the town was notified of the university's intent to sell that the only thing under consideration was whether or not to purchase the land, and that the initial step taken would simply be to authorize the town manager to negotiate a price, not to actually make the purchase.

"This is just the first step," he said. "If UConn comes back with a price that is reasonable for us to consider, then the council would vote on an actual purchase. That is also very different than deciding what we would ultimately do with it."

Should the town determine the negotiated purchase price to be reasonable and want to pursue following through with the deal, the public would have the opportunity to comment, he said.

The public will also be involved in the discussion of what to do with the land should the town purchase it, he said, and Slifka said it is too early to speak on any hopeful plan.

"Whatever would happen with it is something that has to be compatible with the neighborhood, has to be compatible with the traffic patterns and whatever we're going to do with the roads in the area and it's going to be a very deliberate process," he said.

The dream for The New Children's Museum, which has 17 full-time employees and 20 part-time employees in its peak season, is to turn the site into a cultural campus where one of the buildings is repurposed for the museum, one for the preschool, and the other buildings are rehabilitated and used by other non-profit entities. Werle said the museum would seek to lease the property from the town and obtain state funding for the renovation work.

Conny the Whale, the iconic sculpture that sits in front of the current museum, the planetarium, and the spire that is an architectural focal point on the property would all be relocated in any move, Werle said.

"We have a vision of a parade up Trout Brook with the whale," Werle said with a smile. **WHL**

Courtesy photo

Educator Dan Butterworth teaches a class about snakes

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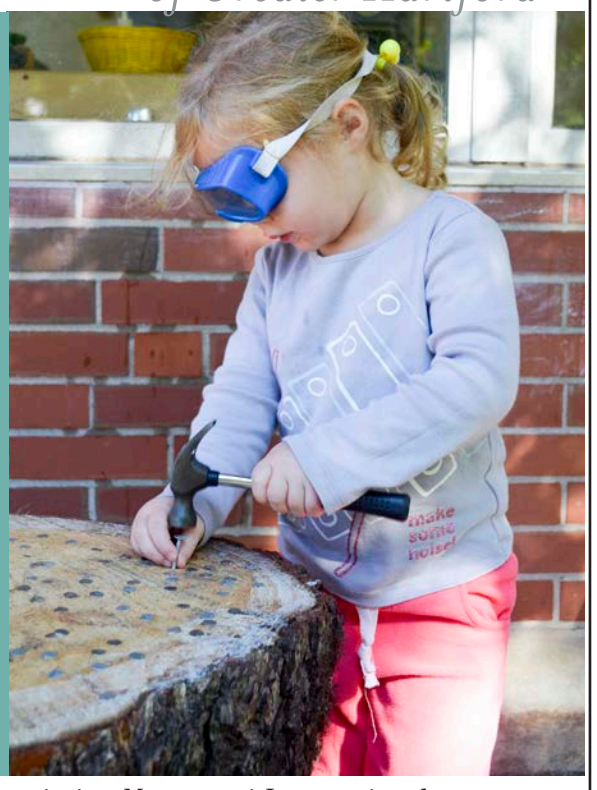

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Future leader

Maeve Healy to be featured in Discovery Girls Magazine

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

After several weeks of writing and some long, hard thinking, Maeve Healy was confronted with the fact that her work may have been wasted as the deadline had come and gone.

"At least I tried," she said.

Maeve, 12, was applying to be featured in Discovery Girls Magazine, a publication for tween girls that covers a variety of topics of interest with content provided by readers who are also prominently featured.

Out of curiosity Maeve went on to the magazines website to find out which girls had made the cut. It was then she noticed that the deadline had been extended.

"I was so happy," she said.

In the end, her hard work paid off – Maeve was one of 36 girls from throughout the country selected to be featured in a 2016 edition of the magazine. Those selected will be flown to California in February to attend a four-day summit. Each edition will feature six girls who will each have a two-page spread.

Maeve Healy, 12, will be featured in a 2016 Discovery Girl Magazine issue. She was selected as one of 36 young girls throughout the country to be featured.

Maeve has subscribed to the magazine for a couple of years, saying, "It covers everything you could ever want to know at 12." Compared to other magazines geared to girls her age, she said, "I feel like Discovery Girls has a lot more in it." She especially enjoys the activities and the articles about topics like friendship.

Last year she first noticed an application to be featured, however the deadline was fast approaching so she decided to wait until 2015.

"It's something I really wanted to do," she said.

The application required Maeve to answer a series of questions. Among them were to describe the most difficult struggle she had to endure, what she was passionate about and if she could have a super power what it would be.

"It was really challenging," Maeve said.

Once Maeve, a seventh grader at Watkinson School, finished her homework, she would spend time on her application. The one question she struggled with was trying to answer if there were one thing she would change about herself, what would it be.

Her mom, Jessica Henning, thought she should not change anything because she "wouldn't be the same person you are today."

Henning said she was not at all surprised her daughter took the initiative to apply.

"We were very pleasantly surprised when she did get in," Henning said. "It seems like something she would do. She worked on it for several weeks." Henning also appreciates that her tween daughter has such a magazine available to her. Maeve will often show her articles in it for them to talk about.

In February, Maeve and her mom will visit California where she will meet the other girls that are to be featured. The trip will include a photo shoot and time to get to know the other girls. Those selected will also be able to help plan the magazine.

"That's cool," Maeve said.

She is excited to be traveling across the country, as the farthest she has been away is Pennsylvania.

"You get to meet a bunch of girls from all over the U.S.; you never have a chance to do that anywhere else."

–Maeve Healy

"You get to meet a bunch of girls from all over the U.S.; you never have a chance to do that anywhere else," Maeve said.

Maeve will be traveling with her mom and the two have decided to spend a day in San Francisco where they will visit Alcatraz.

When Maeve is not busy preparing for her trip she enjoys her studies, with English, history and social studies among her favorite subjects. She also enjoys swimming and is a member of the West Hartford Waves swim team. She also likes spending time with her younger sister, Kate, and her dog, Chelsea.

Writing is something Maeve enjoys so much so, she wrote a novel last year – "Best Frenemies" – about two girls from different family backgrounds who do not like one another at first. Things change when the two have to work together on a project. Maeve said she worked with a high school assistant once a week while writing and she also received help from her English teacher.

This was not her first foray into writing; while in fifth grade she wrote a play with Quest, a program for gifted students.

Although she loves to write, Maeve said she is interested in one day studying marine biology or forensic science. **WHL**

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Slice of LIFE

Submitted photos

1

2

3

4

Winter scenes through the eyes of local artists

We asked local artists to submit their photography and paintings for consideration for this month's West Hartford LIFE cover, with which we wish "Happy Holidays" to our readers. Pictured here are some of our favorite images. 1. "Apres Ski," inspired by Fernridge Park. The work was done by Karen Israel. 2. A photo taken by Phyllis Meredith Photography. 3. A winter scene captured through the lens of Phyllis Meredith. 4. A winter scene at Westmoor Park taken by Gary Holmes.

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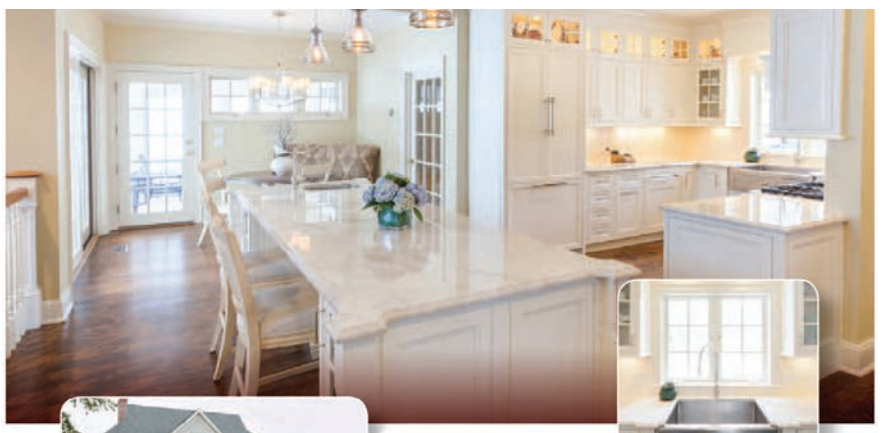

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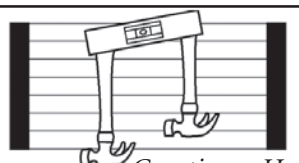

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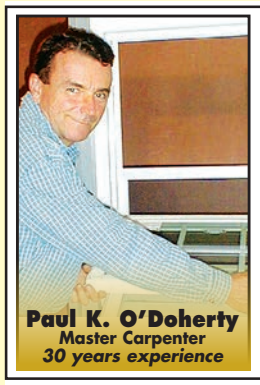

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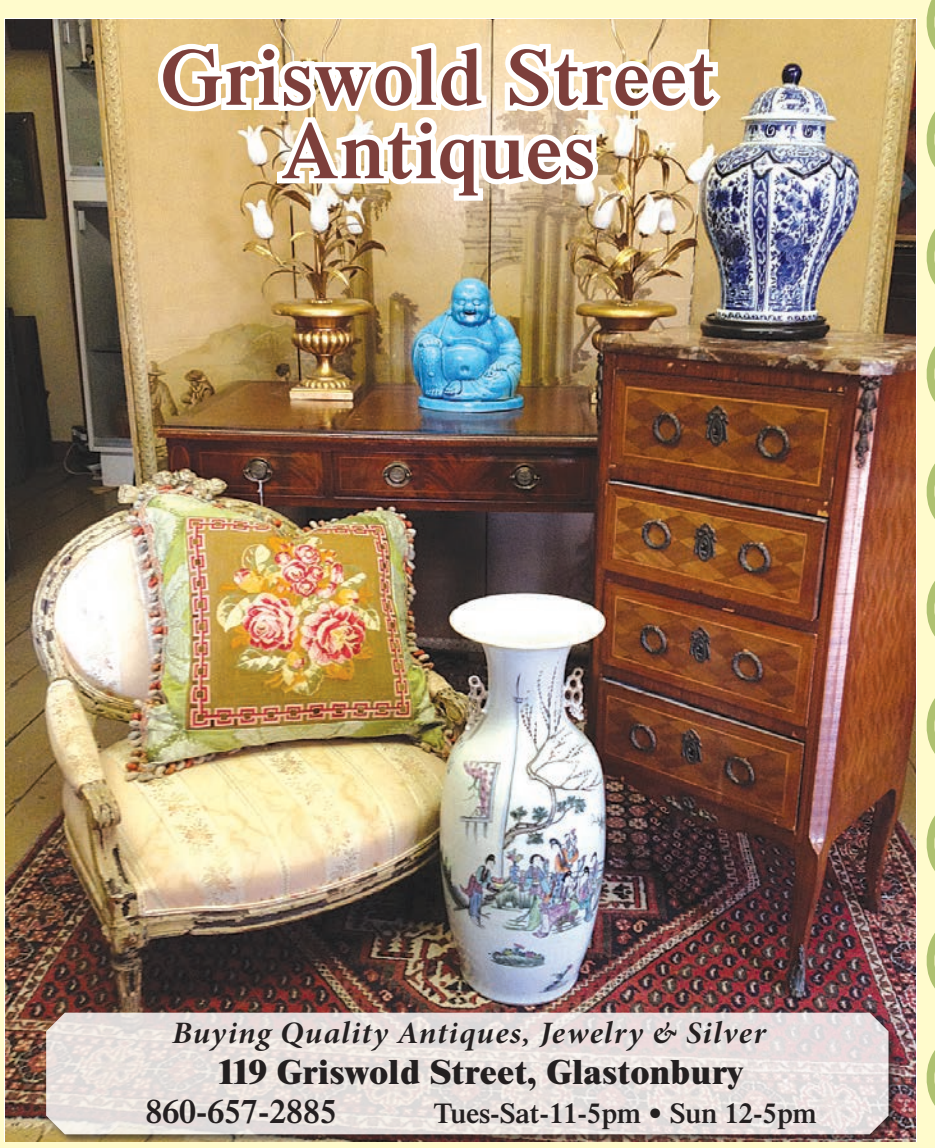

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KEITH TURLEY, Publisher

EDITORIAL
Abigail Albair, Executive Editor
aalbair@turleyct.com
Lynn Woike, Editor
Alison Jalbert, Assistant Editor

STAFF WRITERS
Alicia B. Smith, Allie Rivera, Mara Dresner, David Heuschkel, Ted Glanzer, Sloan Brewster

ADVERTISING SALES
Melissa Friedman, Advertising Director
melissa@turleyct.com, 860-978-1345
Lisa Oster-Zippin
lisa@turleyct.com, 860-264-5652

PAGE DESIGNERS
Daniel Kornegay, Cynthia Martel, Robert Sirois

GRAPHICS DEPARTMENT
Barbara Ouellette, Production Manager
ads@turleyct.com, 860-264-5523
Maureen LaBier, Production Assistant
Corley Fleming, Cynthia Martel, Kathy Kokoszka, Cindie Cagenello

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Writer's block

To heck with hacks

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Hacks. Those simple little tips and tricks that are supposed to make your life – or some part of it – easier and therefore better. They are satisfying solutions to situations you didn't even know were problems; sort of a mini do-it-yourself project for doing something better or faster.

If you live long enough, chances are you will come up with a few clever ways to deal with common annoyances, such as putting your keys with the items in the refrigerator you don't want to forget when you leave, or lighting a piece of raw spaghetti to use as a match to light fireplaces, candles in tall glass cylinders and old gas stoves.

Helpful hints date back to the time of cave paintings showing how to kill wooly mammoths and communicate with the gods. From 1900-10, Gallaher's cigarettes came with little cards illustrating such tricks as preserving freshly laid eggs in a box of salt and removing a splinter by nearly filling a wide-mouth bottle with hot water and then pressing the affected part of the hand against the mouth so that suction would pull down the flesh and the steam would draw out the splinter.

Then, magazines and newspapers began spreading ideas, with an occasional book published. Now, hacks pop up on Facebook, websites, emails, blogs and Pinterest.

"69 Hacks That Will Change Your Life"

"22 Life Hacks So Incredibly Stupid They're Borderline Genius"

"101 Hacks For Using Your Immersion Blender In Every Room"

There are hacks for iPhones, cooking, fitness, travel, cleaning and pets. I can't help myself; they're seductive; I click on them.

I've learned to clean a lampshade with a lint roller and that you can use a staple remover to pry open a key ring, making it easier to add new keys – the trick here being that the staple remover can actually be found.

Someone determined you can chill wine without watering it down by adding frozen grapes to the glass and that Doritos work as kindling when lighting a fire. Then there was a person who determined bills rolled up and slipped into an empty ChapStick container would keep them safe. Obviously, that person doesn't use lip balm because everyone who does knows those tubes are always getting lost.

Just how important are these hacks?

The demonstrations on how to make a CD case by folding paper and how to turn a hoodie into a laptop bag were brilliant, but if ever I found myself having to make either, I wouldn't remember how.

Other hacks seem more complicated than necessary. For instance, one instructs those who cannot master chopsticks to take apart a spring-type clothes pin, replacing each half with a chopstick. I think it would just be easier to just use a fork, yet it was Number 21 in "21 Life-Saving Clothespin Hacks That You Only Wish You Knew Sooner." I didn't consider it lifesaving. Numbers 8, 10 and 13 on that list were lame, while Number 14 saved your fingers – not your life – by using a clothespin to hold a nail about to be hammered.

Now, if you really could open a blister pack with a can opener, that would be a lifesaver, but you can't. At least I couldn't. A toilet paper roll with pushpin legs and a slot cut out on the top to hold your cellphone will not act as speakers.

You can, however, slice one side of that toilet paper roll and pop it around a tube of wrapping paper to keep it from unrolling. That and 100 other hacks can be found involving toilet paper tubes – from organizing cords and pens to starting seedlings.

I find that keeping up with all these hacks gets to be exhausting. Everything becomes a problem to be solved, a task to be managed. Hacks become counterproductive, creating more work. The whole process of improving life becomes a lifestyle, leaving us never satisfied.

I learned long ago that, generally, it takes less energy to live with something the way it is than to change it. That light bulb moment was brought to me by none other than a light bulb – high up on the ceiling of the walk-in closet. It required getting the ladder from the garage, finding a bulb in the linen closet and then climbing up to change it. It was much easier to just use the limited light shining into the closet from the bedroom – at least until that light burned out.

I feel that way about most hacks. For that reason, I'm not going to learn to fold my T-shirts in 10 seconds by locating the right spots between the collar and the shoulder and half the way down the front, crossing my arms and turning it over and back. I'm not going to build furniture from wine corks, either, or score a cheap iced latte by ordering a triple espresso over ice in an extra-large cup and filling the rest with milk from the condiment bar.

Better, I think, to avoid the hack craze than to let it make you crazy. **WHL**

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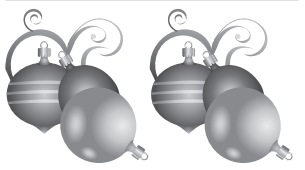

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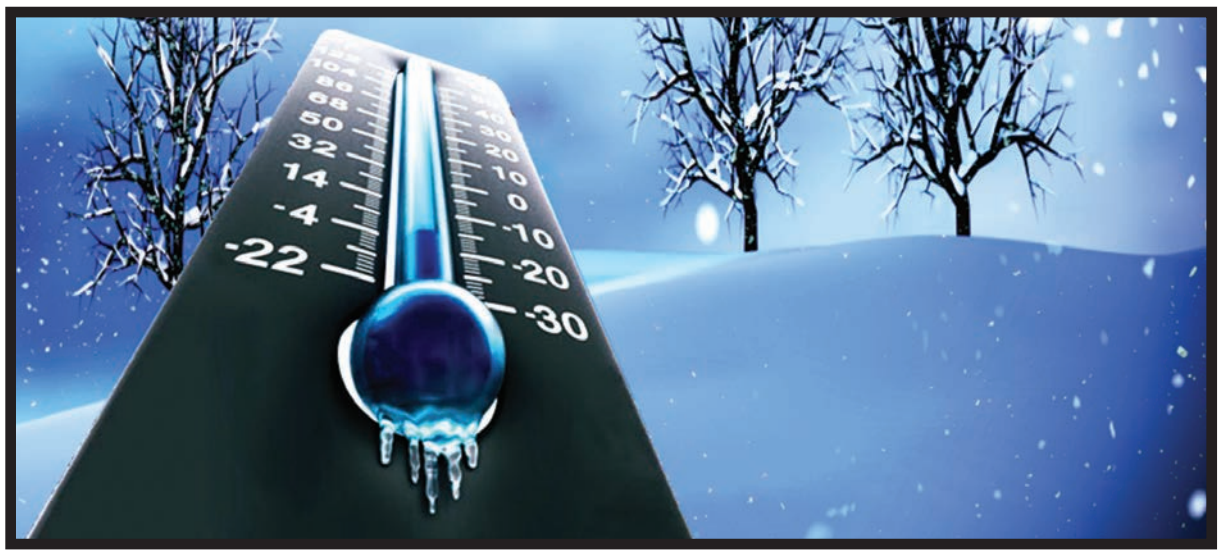
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]



Averages, and Extremes...

Climatologically speaking, January is the coldest month on record here in Connecticut. However, last year, it was February that made headlines – not only the coldest February since records have been kept, but the coldest of all months!

No matter if it's hot, or cold... dry, or wet...we're always crunching numbers. It's important to know how the weather we are dealing with compares to the past. It helps us make correlations and to track trends over time.

The term normal can be somewhat misleading, "average" is more appropriate in many cases. When talking about temperatures being "above" or "below" or even when it comes to rain/snow with a "surplus" or "deficit" ...the values we are using as points of reference are based on a mathematical average over a 30 year timespan, typically three consecutive decades.

So, specifically for the month of January... how does the month shape up? On the 1st, the average low is 19 while the average high is 35. By the end of the month, there is not much fluctuation... 18 and 35, respectively. For snow, 12.3 inches is average.

In the realm of extremes, January of 2011 holds the record for snowiest with 54.3 inches. The coldest temperature recorded in the month was 26 degrees below zero, in 1961! On the flipside, the warmest temperature recorded in the 31 day period was 72, in 2007. **WHL**

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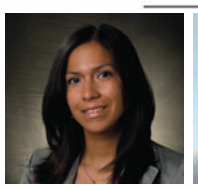
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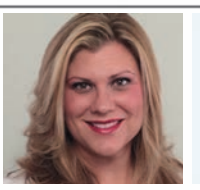
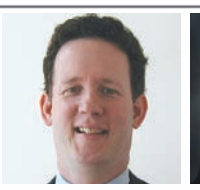
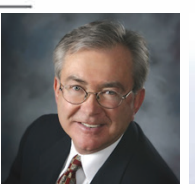
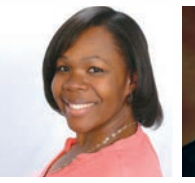
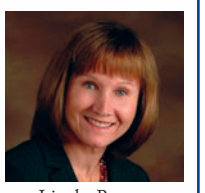

Katie Baker


Mike Barnes


David Bobowski


Jeanne Burston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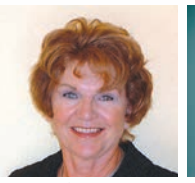
Ed Carreto

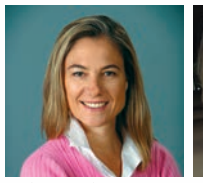
Louise Cooley

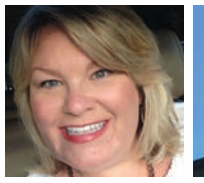
Linus Deasy

Mark Dichiara

Dilton Dornelas


Wanda Dumais


Alessandra Eisner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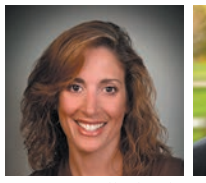
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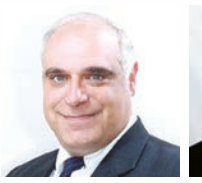
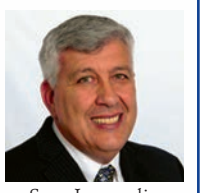
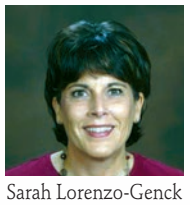

Paul LaRosa


Sam Lomaglio


Sarah Lorenzo-Genck

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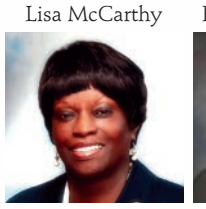
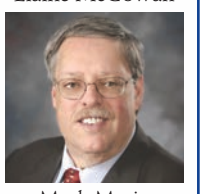

Natalie Mendes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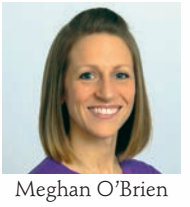
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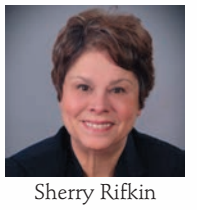
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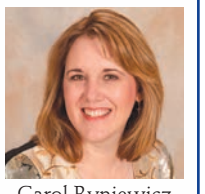
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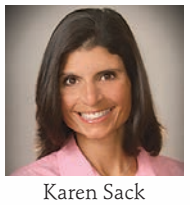
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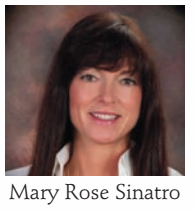
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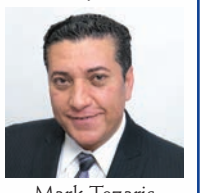
Billy Stiles

Tammy Taiwo

Nick Tardette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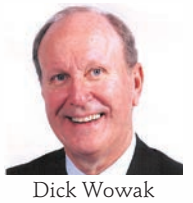
Kidean Thompson

Chris Tracy

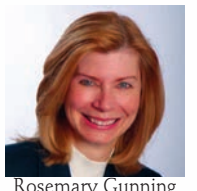
Michael Truong

Judi Vanacore

Liz Wells


Dick Wowak

Nadia Kachwaha
Commercial Sales Associate


Rosemary Gunning
Manager

Silvie Fillion
Mortgage

***Agents not pictured: Sara Arute, Debbie Chisolm, Adrian Myles and Commercial Sales Associate Ken Schwartz*

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